

# Commentary

October 2007

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## The Past, Present, and Future of Neoconservatism

*Joshua Muravchik*

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### Bowling with Others

*James Q. Wilson*

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### Of Priests, Rabbis, and Wives

*Meir Soloveichik*

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### Are We Ready for China?

*Aaron L. Friedberg*

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### Rooting for the Indians—A Memoir

*Hillel Halkin*

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### In the Tents of Kabul

*Rosanne Klass*

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### Beyond the Musical Avant-Garde

*Terry Teachout*

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### “The Case for Bombing Iran” *Norman Podhoretz & Critics*

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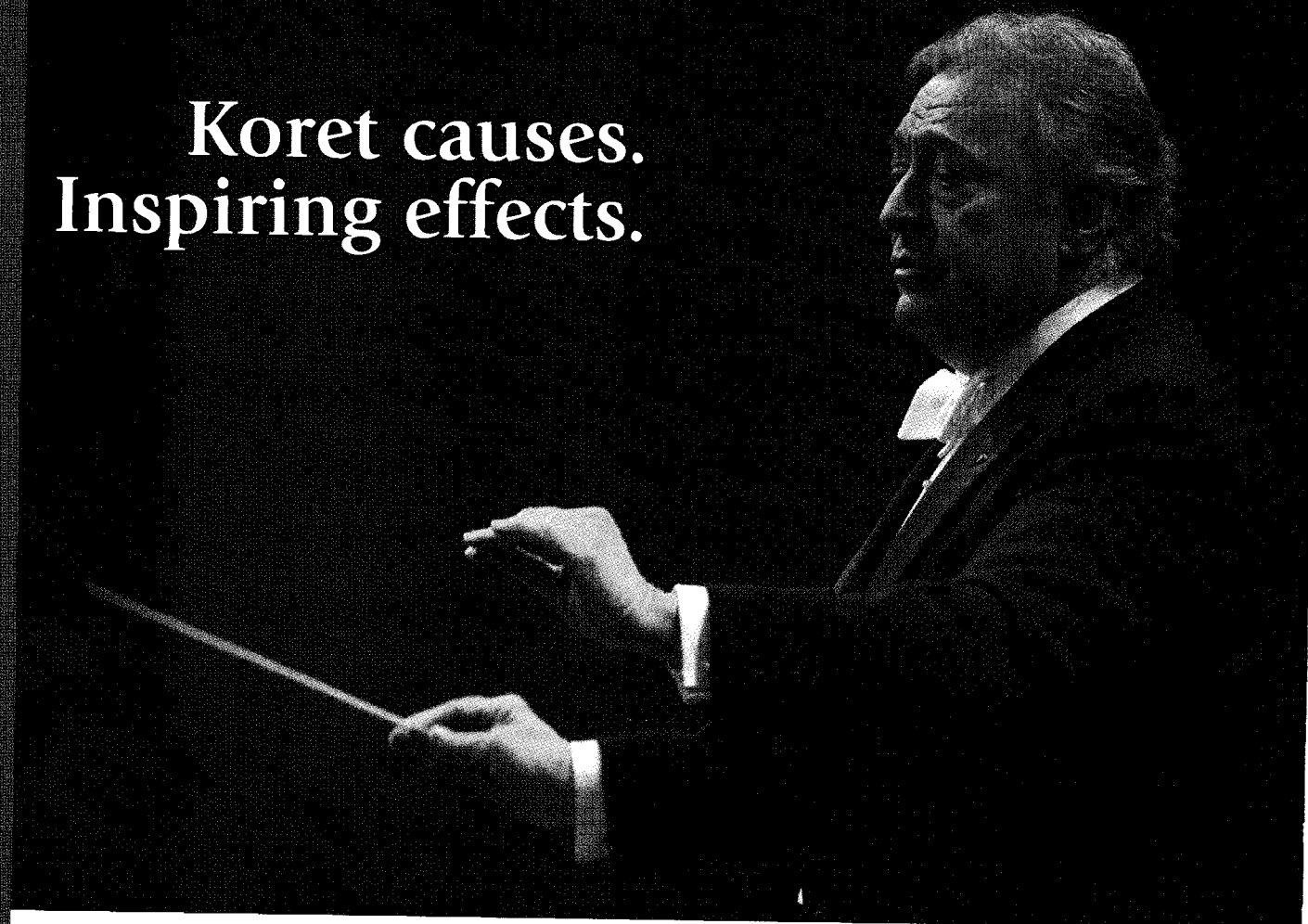
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*Sam Schulman • Gabriel Schoenfeld • Benjamin A. Plotinsky*

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# Commentary®

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## Letters from Readers

### Confronting Iran

#### TO THE EDITOR:

In "The Case for Bombing Iran" [June], Norman Podhoretz continues to liken the challenge posed today by "Islamofascism" to last century's ideological conflicts with the Nazis and Soviets. But he fails to take his own analysis to its logical conclusion. After all, bombing Iran would at best only delay, not neutralize, Tehran's nuclear program. Moreover, many military experts argue that Iran's nuclear facilities are so well hidden and dispersed that it would be impossible to strike at them successfully from the air. Why, then, does Mr. Podhoretz not advocate a full-scale invasion to "drain" another "swamp" of terror and rid the world of a monstrous threat?

Perhaps the reason is that five years ago he misidentified Iraq as *the* strategic threat. Indeed, our soldiers are still drowning as they try to drain that particular

swamp. And not only have America's military forces been weakened and stretched thin as a result of the Iraq campaign, but our diplomatic tools and political might have also been depleted. In arguing for opening a new theater in the war on terror, Mr. Podhoretz quickly passes over these circumstances by saying they do not matter next to the horror of a nuclear Iran. But clearly they are affecting his thinking or he would not limit our options with Iran—in the middle of "World War IV"—to a mere bombing campaign.

Mr. Podhoretz credits Ronald Reagan (among others) for forcing the collapse of the Soviet Union. But Reagan did not carry out any new strategy; he merely reinvigorated a brilliant policy that was put in place by Harry Truman, a policy that created an alliance of democracies to contain and, where necessary, combat tyranny. This strategy used the threat of military might

together with political and economic sanctions, diplomacy, sophisticated ideological warfare, and direct support for democratic forces in order to contain the Soviet bloc and force it to collapse of its own weakness.

Mr. Podhoretz gainsays implementing such a strategy today—sanctions "rarely work," Iranian leaders act irrationally, diplomacy is hopeless, Western Europe is "Findlandized" by its Muslim minority, and so on—and instead advocates preemptive and unilateral war without any clear reason other than fear. But fear is no basis for clear analysis, much less for sound strategy. We did not have such enormous foreign-policy success during the cold war by acting on our fears; we won because of our strengths. It is time to return to them.

ERIC CHENOWETH  
*Institute for Democracy in  
Eastern Europe  
Washington, D.C.*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

I share Norman Podhoretz's dislike of the regime in Tehran and largely concur with his assessment of the dangers it poses. I also agree that the current course of diplomacy with Iran is frustrating and uncertain. Still, I cannot agree with him that a military strike is the solution.

Iran's leadership is cunning, resourceful, and hostile, but it is not suicidal. It uses aggressive rhetoric as a means to advance its pretensions to regional power, but it is not likely to follow through with action. Nor is Iran's leadership monolithic. There are differences among top officials about the wisdom of continuing to defy the UN Security Council. Many elites, moreover, have no fondness whatsoever for the Islamic revolution. If America increased nonviolent pressures, internal divisions could widen.

Contrary to what Mr. Podhoretz suggests, Iran has

little potential to lead the Middle East and expel the American presence from it. As a Persian and Shiite state in a region of Sunni Arabs, Iran is actually quite limited in its influence. Many of its appeals to the "Arab street" have driven Arab countries closer to Israel. The confidence that Tehran projects is driven by what it sees as American weakness in Iraq, but it is not backed by military strength.

Nor am I so certain that Iran is dead set on acquiring nuclear weapons. Iran seeks not only power but also international respectability. Leaving the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or stating its nuclear plans clearly would undermine that goal and set the country on a collision course with its neighbors.

In any case, for Iran to exploit a nuclear capacity would not be as easy as it sounds. There are grave existential risks for the weaker party in a nuclear competition, and that is what Iran would be next to, say, the U.S. or Israel. Deterrence could still hold.

A perfectly executed strike by the U.S. on all known nuclear sites might delay Iran's program. But the result could also be a strengthened and more determined regime that would have the sympathy of many in Europe and Asia for its battle against American unilateralism. The repercussions in the Middle East—even without a strong Iranian response there or on the U.S. homeland—would be destabilizing for American allies and interests.

Because the Islamic republic is not about to be brought down spontaneously by Iranians, the U.S. should focus on chang-

ing the regime's behavior rather than on replacing the regime itself. The aim of U.S. policy should be to demonstrate to Iran the benefits of renouncing its revolutionary pretensions and becoming a normal state. If all this does not work, the U.S. should reinforce its deterrence capacity and take measures—arms sales, security assurances, and missile-defense technologies—to dilute and offset Iran's nascent nuclear capability.

SHAHRAM CHUBIN  
*Geneva Centre for Security Policy  
Geneva, Switzerland*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz lumps together many widely disparate elements under the rubric of the "Islamofascist" enemy. The highest religious authorities of Saudi Arabia and Egypt have issued many *fatwas* against Shiite Muslims. Osama bin Laden and the Taliban despise Iranians. Sunnis and Shiites are at each other's throats in Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, and elsewhere. Yet Mr. Podhoretz believes that these factions are magically "willing to set sectarian differences aside when it comes to forging jihadist alliances against the infidels," all under (Shiite) Iran's leadership.

If Mr. Podhoretz's theory is correct, why is it that Iran played a major role in defeating the Taliban and helping to erect Afghanistan's national-unity government? Why is it that Iran, though capable of creating hell for U.S. forces in Iraq, has been relatively restrained?

Mr. Podhoretz's likening of Iran to Nazi Germany in 1938 is ludicrous. Germany,

a powerful nation that had been humiliated a few decades earlier in World War I, had major grievances against the victors. Adolf Hitler was a charismatic leader, and Germany's culture was such that its people would follow him blindly. And Germany had a powerful military, backed by advanced technological and industrial capacity.

Iran, by contrast, has no territorial claims against any other nation, nor has it attacked any of its neighbors for 250 years. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is not a charismatic leader and is, in fact, in deep trouble at home, even among his own supporters. Anti-authoritarian thinking runs deep in Persian culture, and Iranians do not blindly follow their leaders. Iran, finally, does not have an advanced economy, and its air force and navy are museum quality.

All foreign-policy decisions in Iran are made by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini. He does extensive consulting with Iran's National Security Council, the Expediency Council, former leaders, and the military. Say what one will about Iran's mode of government, the result has been a calculated, pragmatic foreign policy. Above all, Khomeini has issued a *fatwa* against the production of nuclear weapons.

Ahmadinejad's remarks about Israel are deplorable, and have been roundly condemned, even within Iran. But others have noted that he has not actually called for Israel to be "wiped off the map." Iran's position since the 1979 revolution has always been that Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Holy Land must vote freely in a referendum to select

their destiny for themselves. Khatami went even further, declaring that any solution that would be acceptable to the Palestinians would be acceptable to Iran.

Mr. Podhoretz's worry that Iran could detonate a nuclear weapon in Israel is misplaced. Iran's leaders consider themselves the protectors of the Palestinians and of Islam's holy sites in Jerusalem. Any attack on Israel would wipe these out, too, besides provoking a counterattack that would wipe Iran off the map.

MUHAMMAD SAHIMI  
*University of Southern California  
Los Angeles, California*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

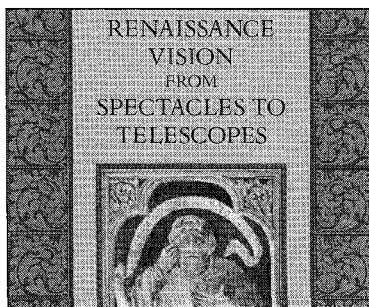
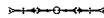
I have several problems with Norman Podhoretz's argument that the U.S. should bomb Iran's nuclear facilities. Although he acknowledges that many of Iran's underground facilities are effectively invulnerable to conventional bombing, he still believes that surgical air raids could set back Iran's nuclear program for several years. But where is the evidence for this? Iran has no doubt learned the lesson from Israel's 1981 attack on Saddam Hussein's Osirak complex, and very likely has stationed its own nuclear facilities out of harm's way.

In any case, over the past few years President Bush has effectively spent in Iraq whatever political capital he might have had for an air campaign against Iran. It is inconceivable that Congress or the American people would support such a difficult, expensive, and dangerous mission now or anytime in the near future.

Dismissing the possibility that "mutual assured de-

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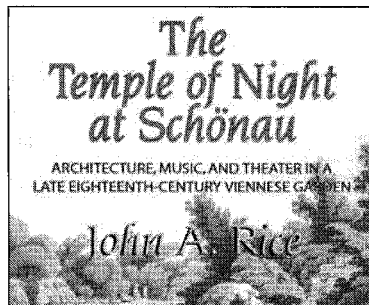
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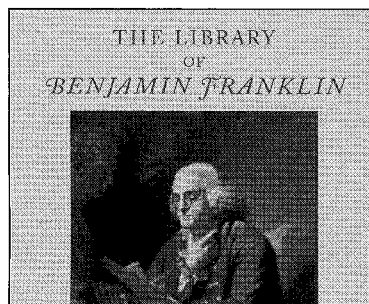
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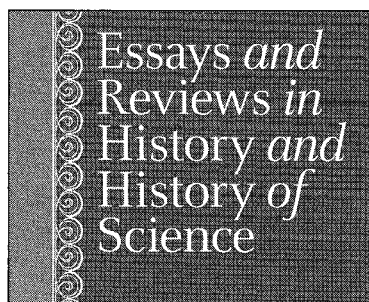
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struction" would be an effective deterrent in the case of Iran, Mr. Podhoretz cites the comments of successive Iranian leaders that in a nuclear exchange between Israel and Iran, the latter would survive while the former would be destroyed. But this does not mean that bombing Iran now is the only way out. Instead, the U.S. should loudly and clearly disabuse Iran of the notion that it might survive after having launched a nuclear attack on Israel or anyone else. Although there are very likely some martyrs among the Iranian hierarchy willing to "let Iran burn" (as Ayatollah Khomeini put it), it is far more likely that the present supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, would retreat under the threat of immediate and certain extinction in retaliation for the detonation of an Iranian nuclear weapon.

LEWIS A. GLENN  
*Danville, California*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

In arguing for the inexpressibly dangerous (and illegal) preemptive bombing of Iran, Norman Podhoretz waves the claim that Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has threatened to "wipe Israel off the map." But numerous expert articles, well distributed in the public sphere, have debunked this notion. They have shown the "threat" attributed to Ahmadinejad to have been based on a mistranslation by the Iranian news agency of words he uttered in 2005.

In brief, Ahmadinejad had been quoting a statement by Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1980's that "this occupation regime [of Israel's] will be erased from the page of time." Destruction

of the country as a whole was certainly not what was meant. (Recall that at the time, Israel was supplying Iran with military equipment.)

Observers may legitimately disagree about Iran's true intentions today, based on different readings of its leadership's rhetoric and its nuclear ambitions. But given the catastrophic outcome of misreading partial information with respect to Iraq, it behooves everyone to be extremely cautious in making assessments.

VIRGINIA TILLEY  
*Human Sciences Research  
Council  
Pretoria, South Africa*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

As an example of Britain's tepid response to Iran's taking captive several of its sailors back in March, Norman Podhoretz quotes the public reaction of Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt to a photograph of one of the prisoners with a cigarette in his mouth: "This [smoking] sends completely the wrong message to our young people." But this little anecdote cannot be used as evidence of Western weakness in the face of Iranian aggression. The quotation was fabricated as part of an April Fools' joke in the London *Guardian*.

NEIL FORD  
*Sydney, Australia*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz ably describes the Iranian threat and presents a strong case for confronting it. About the nature of the threat there can be no doubt. As we show in our 2006 book, *What Makes Tehran Tick?*, the Islamic republic's revolutionary ideology drives it to seek enemies abroad. Its

pursuit of nuclear weapons, support for international terrorism, and campaign to destabilize Iraq are ideological interests that cannot be negotiated away.

Mr. Podhoretz feels that diplomacy and sanctions have failed to halt Iran's aggression, and military strikes are the only viable option. But we would argue that before military action (which should not be taken off the table), Washington should mount a real effort to empower the Iranian people, through their main opposition groups, to topple the regime of the mullahs. Regrettably, this has not yet been tried.

The main Iranian opposition group, the Mujahideen e Khalq (MEK), has domestic support within Iran, in the Sunni Arab heartland, and among Western sympathizers. But at present, the MEK is designated by Washington as a terrorist organization. This should change. Besides being a democratic force in Iran, the MEK can also be of help to us in monitoring Tehran's nuclear program as well as its subversive efforts in Iraq.

We do not need to arm or fund the MEK, or even to provide it with political support. But if we are to avoid the drastic measures that Mr. Podhoretz advocates and that may become necessary, we must give Iranians every chance to achieve regime change on their own.

RAYMOND TANTER  
THOMAS MCINERNEY  
*Iran Policy Committee  
Washington, D.C.*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz writes that he has lost faith in the ability of the Iranian people

to overthrow the theocratic regime that rules their country. He assumes that if the Iranians really desired regime change, they would follow the example set in the 1980's by the democratic dissidents of Poland's Solidarity movement. What Mr. Podhoretz seems to be forgetting is that our government did everything it could to encourage Solidarity. With respect to Iran, however, the U.S. (along with the EU) has designated the oldest, largest, most organized, and most popular of Iranian opposition groups, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), as a foreign terrorist organization. Whether this was done because of political pressure, political naiveté, or the desire to do business with the Islamic republic, the West has cut a bad deal for the Iranian people.

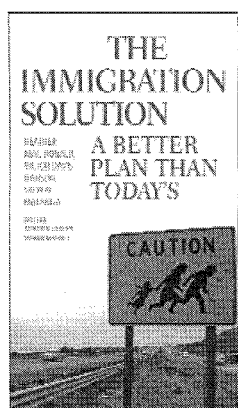
DANIEL M. ZUCKER  
*Americans for Democracy in  
the Middle East  
New York City*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz is right to apply the Bush Doctrine's strategy of preemption to the threat from Iran, but his target is not the right one. Bombing Iran's hardened nuclear sites could invite drastic retaliation by the mullahs and economic disaster for Western countries that depend upon oil from the Persian Gulf. Iran could withhold oil supplies, destroy competing oil fields in the gulf, and interdict sea traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, through which passes a huge percentage of the world's daily production of oil.

Iran has a fleet of small suicide boats and short-range missiles to be deployed for such action, and as we saw with the USS

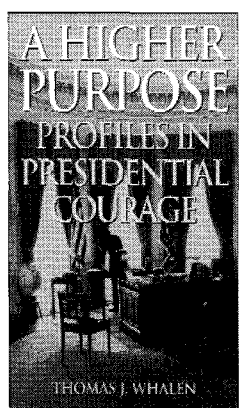
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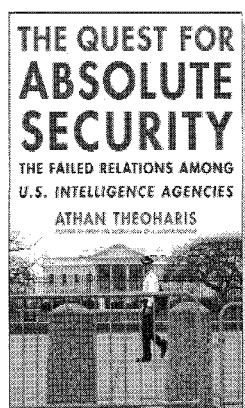
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THOMAS J.  
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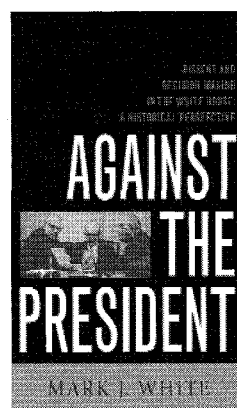
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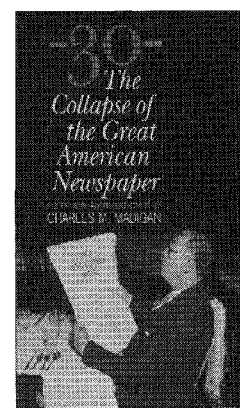
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CHARLES M.  
MADIGAN,  
EDITOR

## -30-

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*Cole*, a single successful attack by a cheap, explosive-laden small craft can render a multi-million dollar vessel helpless. Massive land attacks against our forces in Iraq by suicide squads are not inconceivable, either—the mullahs have ordered such operations before, during their war with Iraq in the 1980's. And bombardment of Israel has already been threatened by Iran's president.

Success against Iran ultimately depends on destroying the regime, not just its nuclear sites. For that reason, I find more compelling the strategy proposed by Arthur Herman in these pages ["Getting Serious About Iran: A Military Option," November 2006]. As Herman shows, systematic strikes against soft targets—command and control, air defenses, missile sites, naval assets, and especially oil-refinery and storage facilities—could defang the theocracy while simultaneously protecting the oil resources and vital shipping lanes in the gulf.

WESLEY CLARK  
*San Diego, California*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

In my opinion, Norman Podhoretz's "The Case for Bombing Iran" is the most important article COMMENTARY has ever published, and I have been reading the magazine for over 50 years.

RICHARD L. RUBENSTEIN  
*Florida State University  
Tampa, Florida*

NORMAN PODHORETZ  
writes:

In my article, I tried to show that John McCain was right when he said that the only thing worse than bombing Iran is allowing

Iran to get the bomb. I did this by (1) spelling out what was likely to happen if Iran should succeed in going nuclear; (2) demonstrating why neither diplomacy nor sanctions nor an internal insurrection could be relied upon to prevent this; (3) acknowledging the potential dangers of a bombing campaign; (4) drawing the unhappy conclusion that such a campaign was the only way to stop, or at least retard for years to come, the regime's otherwise inexorable progress toward acquiring nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them; and (5) expressing the hope that George W. Bush would make good on his promise not to permit Iran to develop a nuclear capability, and would do so by ordering air strikes against its nuclear facilities.

In the months since the article was posted on the Internet, I have been described throughout the blogosphere as "pathological scum," a "morally repugnant cretin," a "super-annuated Zionist hack," a "war criminal," a "traitor to the U.S.," and a "threat to our grandchildren"—not to mention other even more colorful characterizations unfit for quotation in a family magazine. Imagine my relief, then, when I read the letters above, where the worst crime of which I am accused is being wrong.

Grateful though I am for the mildness of this charge, however, I can no more plead guilty to it than I can to being already responsible (in the language of the blogosphere's indictment) for the "murder" of "millions of innocent Iraqis" and to conspiring now to add "millions of innocent Iranians" to my record-breaking

achievements as a "genocidal maniac."

In his own indictment, Eric Chenoweth recycles every cliché of the antiwar movement to prove that I am not only wrong about Iran but that I was also wrong five years ago about Iraq. Well, as he will discover if he subjects himself to a reading of my new book, *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism*, I still believe that Saddam Hussein—as the secular face of the two-headed monster against which we have been fighting for the past six years—did indeed pose a strategic threat to us and that we were right to overthrow him. And as to why I advocate bombing rather than invading Iran, he will discover that I place a strong emphasis on "the prudential judgment" that determines which fights to pick at a given moment and which to delay until the time is ripe, when to pause and when to advance, and which tactic is the right one to use in maneuvering on a particular front. For the rest, Mr. Chenoweth paints an idealized picture of how containment worked in World War III, both before and during Reagan's return to it, and he seems to think that all by itself his rosy description refutes the careful case I made for bombing Iran.

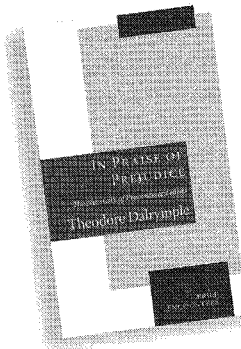
President Bush has said that if we allow Iran to go nuclear, people 50 years from now will look back at us, just as we look back at the men of Munich who failed to stop Hitler when there was still time, and ask, "How could they have allowed this to happen?" The answer, if (God forbid) it should come to that, can be found in Mr. Chenoweth's letter.

Shahram Chubin, Mu-

hammad Sahimi, Lewis A. Glenn, and Virginia Tilley are all guilty of another Munich-like sin, namely, refusing to believe that Ahmadinejad means what he says when he says that he intends to wipe Israel off the map, no less than Hitler did when he promised to solve the "Jewish problem." Indeed, Mr. Sahimi and Ms. Tilley are so desperate to shut their ears to this horror that they even buy into the myth that it all stems from a misunderstanding.

This piece of propagandistic nonsense is evidently based on the fact that a literal translation of the words the Ayatollah Khomeini used and that Ahmadinejad has cited would be "wipe out [or "purge"] the stain of disgrace from the center of the Islamic world." That this carries the same meaning as "wipe Israel off the map" is not only clear in itself, but is confirmed by how the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) reported in its own English edition on Ahmadinejad's speech to a conference on "The World Without Zionism" held in Tehran on October 26, 2005: "Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Wednesday called for Israel to be 'wiped off the map.'" Since then Ahmadinejad has made the same threat on a number of other occasions.

Speaking of myths about statements, Neil Ford seems to be spreading a new one. If the remark I attributed to Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt was fabricated as an April Fools' joke by the London *Guardian*, surely that would have been obvious to the other British papers that quoted it. Still, if Mr. Ford is right, which I doubt, I for one would



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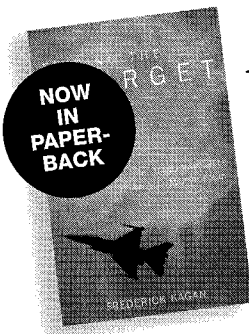
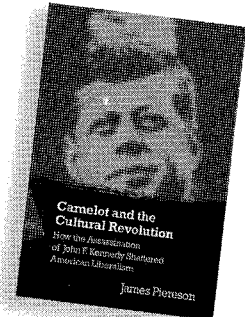
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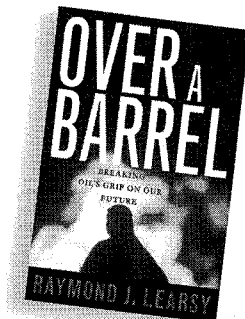
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welcome it as a sign that while the British may be down, they're not so flat as all that.

Shahram Chubin makes my head spin. He begins by saying that he "largely concur[s]" with my "assessment of the dangers" posed by the regime in Tehran, but he then goes on, point by point, to argue the opposite case, thereby joining the chorus of those who refuse to take seriously what Ahmadinejad and the other rulers of Iran say about their intentions.

Muhammad Sahimi, adding his voice to the same Munich-like chorus, denies that Iran poses any danger at all to anyone, not even Israel. He also claims that the division between Sunni and Shiite Muslims shows that there is no such thing as Islamofascism. Yet this division has not prevented Iran

from supplying weapons to both the Shiites of Hizballah and the Sunnis of Hamas, as well as (in a characteristically opportunistic switch) the Taliban in Afghanistan; from allying itself with Syria; and from (yes) "creating hell for U.S. forces in Iraq" with the objective of driving us out so that, as Ahmadinejad recently put it, Iran can "fill the gap with the help of neighbors and regional friends like Saudi Arabia." So much for the *fatwas* against Shiite Muslims issued by "the highest religious authorities of Saudi Arabia."

Nor is any comfort to be derived from the fact that Ahmadinejad is not the same person as Hitler or that Iran today is not the same country as Germany in 1938. For as I argued in my article, Iran today has this in com-

mon with Nazi Germany in 1938: rather than a "normal state" with negotiable grievances, it is (as Mr. Chubin is honest enough to concede) a "revolutionary" regime seeking to change the international order.

As to my worry that Iran would use nuclear weapons against Israel, Mr. Sahimi considers it "misplaced." How, he asks, could Iran's leaders do such a thing when an attack on Israel would also wipe out the Palestinians, of whom Iran's leaders "consider themselves the protectors"? (What?!—even though most Palestinians are Sunnis?) The answer to Mr. Sahimi's question can be found in the statements quoted in my article—statements both by Khomeini ("I say let Iran go up in smoke provided Islam emerges triumphant in the rest of the world") and by the putative "moderate" Rafsanjani ("If a day comes when the world of Islam is duly equipped with the arms Israel has in possession . . . application of an atomic bomb would not leave anything in Israel, but the same thing would just produce damages in the Muslim world"). But of course (see Mr. Glenn's letter) the Munich-like chorus of today dismisses such statements as mere rhetoric, just as Hitler's threats were taken then as—to borrow a word Hannah Arendt used in discussing Eichmann—"rodomontade."

Raymond Tanter and Thomas McNerney, along with David Zucker, still believe in the possibility of a democratic insurrection that, by getting rid of the rogue regime now in power, would rescue us from the terrible dilemma of what to do about Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Would

that I could take refuge in the same hope—which, as I indicated in my article, I once shared. But, *pace* Mr. Zucker, I knew Solidarity, and the NCRI, which has very close, if somewhat murky, ties to the MEK cited by Messrs. Tanter and McNerney, is no Solidarity. First of all, its commitment to democracy is (to put it gently) nowhere so clear as was Solidarity's. Furthermore, reports indicate that it has been losing support, and given the stepped-up activity of the repressive apparatus in Iran, its chances of overthrowing the multiparty are in all probability less good than ever.

Like a number of other commentators, Mr. Zucker, and to a lesser extent Messrs. Tanter and McNerney, blame the Bush administration for failing to do for the MEK and/or the NCRI what they imagine the Reagan administration did for Solidarity. By now, everyone blames Bush for everything that has gone wrong, and denies him credit for everything that has gone right, in the past six years, so why not throw this accusation into the pot as well? But Mr. Zucker, like Mr. Chenoweth on containment, is romanticizing when he chides me for forgetting that "our government did everything it could to encourage Solidarity." Having been there and having actively participated in the debates on the subject, I can assure him that it was not "our government" but the AFL-CIO under Lane Kirkland that "did everything it could" for Solidarity. I myself attacked Ronald Reagan at the time for asking us to put a candle in our windows as a show of support for Solidarity while re-



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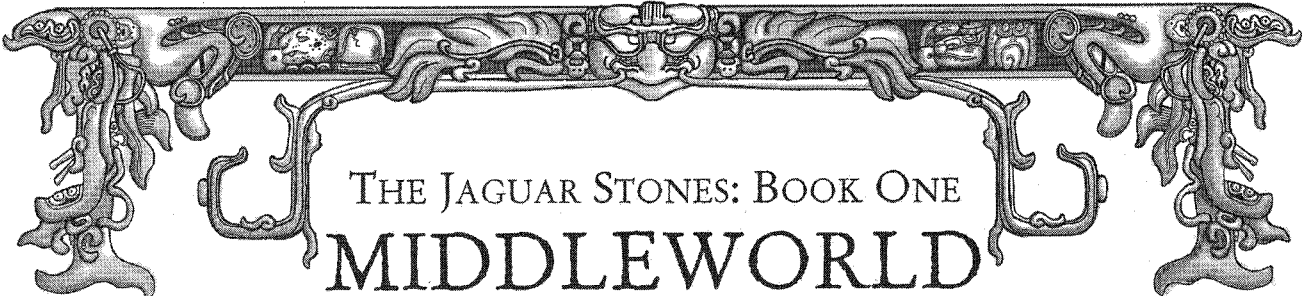
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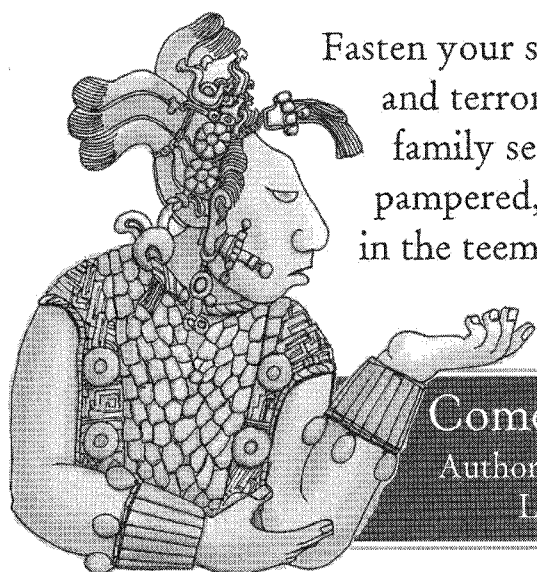
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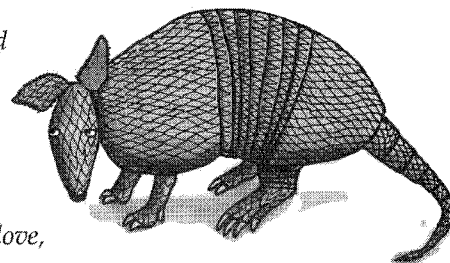
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fusing for his own part to put serious economic pressure on the Polish regime then in power.

The truth is that Solidarity—with a little help from its nongovernmental friends—succeeded because of its own courage and determination, and because the Soviets had by then lost the will to send in the tanks as they had done in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. I see nothing comparable at work in Iran. I wish I did, but I don't.

Besides, time is a crucial factor here, as it was not in Poland. No one knows how close the Iranians have already come to achieving a nuclear capability, but it is only prudent to accept the lower estimates, which put them a year or so away from the point of no return. Why is this prudent? Because, as President Bush has rightly declared in explaining why preemption is a necessary element of our strategy in World War IV, "If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long." The same rule can be applied, conversely, to the hope that a democratic insurrection will break out in Iran.

Wesley Clark (whose judgment is far superior to that of his incredibly silly namesake, the retired general) gives us a good summary of the actions proposed in these pages by Arthur Herman. I am all for them, too, but I think they should be implemented not as a substitute for bombing but as a preliminary step on the way to hitting the nuclear facilities themselves.

Finally, in response to Richard L. Rubenstein: I am not famous for my humility, but I assume that the amazing superlative he be-

stows on my article is a measure not of its superiority to all the other pieces that have been published in COMMENTARY over the last 50 years (I could name a great many that are better in one way or another) but of how seriously he believes the threat of another Holocaust should be taken. Which doesn't mean that I don't feel both grateful for and deeply honored by what he says about my own analysis of the dimensions of that threat and of why nothing but a bombing campaign can succeed in heading it off.

### Zionism

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Reading Hillel Halkin's dark thoughts about Zionism and Israel, I kept wondering if I was truly living in the same country as he ["If Israel Ceased to Exist," June]. Around me, I see a land with a booming economy; an energetic, enterprising people with (for the most part) a clear-eyed approach to national security; flourishing arts and sciences and universities; ever-strengthening Jewish institutions, as the government monopoly on religious affairs is increasingly marginalized; improving cuisine, architecture, and even weather. Perhaps I am missing the scythe hanging over our heads—I do not see Iran and the demographics of the Palestinians as insurmountable problems—but it seems to me that by any historical standard, the Jews in Israel are living in an arcadia.

HILLEL ASHER  
*Herzliya, Israel*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin sees the idea of Jewish "specialness" as a paralyzing myth that the Jews of Israel (and the Diaspora) should break free of. Perhaps this is his way of promoting the Zionist aim for the Jews to be a nation like every other or perhaps he has a fantastical notion of specialness. Maybe his insider's perspective is distorting. Either way, he is far too modest, as he would surely recognize if he visited among the millions of Americans who draw inspiration from the Jewish state.

Israel may have its share of corrupt politicians and societal problems, but let us not forget that it is also a living demonstration of how the flames of peoplehood, culture, democracy, and courage can be kept alive in modern times. If that is not special, the word has no meaning.

PETER FRANKLIN  
*Austin, Texas*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin's essay is both fascinating and heart-wrenching. It also reveals a great deal about the problems with Israeli society as it is currently constituted. Mr. Halkin notes that if more American Jews had immigrated to Israel over the years, the Jewish demographic situation in Israel would be much better off. Thus, he suggests, they have failed to embrace the ancient dream of a return from exile to Zion.

On the other hand, Mr. Halkin says that he cannot blame American Jews for this. "Israel," he writes, "is not the Jewish state these American Jews hoped for." Given its history of war and political incompetence, far from being a "light unto

the nations,' it is not even a light unto the Jews." The modern Jew, it seems, must make his peace with Israel's lack of specialness.

There is an irony in Mr. Halkin's complaint. Was not the purpose of modern Zionism, at least according to many of its founders, to allow the Jews to be like every other people? Should it be a surprise that Israel has in fact turned out to be a flawed nation like the rest?

The secular character of the Jewish state matters more than Mr. Halkin allows. In his discussion of demographics, he does not note the high birthrate among observant Jews in Israel. If all Israeli Jews were as fruitful, the demographic troubles that keep him awake at night would not be much of a worry. Israel, at least on that score, would be in much better shape.

Near the end of his essay, Mr. Halkin notes that the world refuses to treat Israel like just another state, and the Jews like just another people. He wonders whether the world might be insisting on something that "religiously skeptical" Jews like himself are loath to concede—namely, that the Jews are "forever destined or doomed to a special and inescapable fate." In response, he cautions that "before picking up the gauntlet that is again being flung at their feet, Jews should be wary of slipping back into the delusions [of specialness] that Israel should have cured them of." A traditional Jew might respond differently: "*A mentsch tracht, un Got lacht*" (Man plans, and God laughs). If, to paraphrase Tevye, modern Israel was created to allow God to choose someone else every

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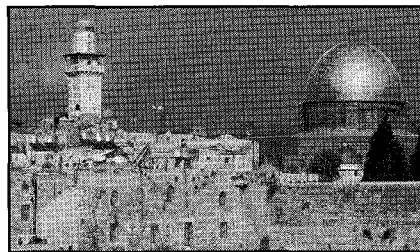
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now and then, Mr. Halkin's essay raises the question of whether, in that sense, the Zionist project has failed.

RICHARD SAMUELSON  
*Claremont McKenna College  
Claremont, California*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

It seems to me that Hillel Halkin overstates the degree to which American Jews continue to harbor notions of Jewish "specialness." Thus, I cannot agree with his suggestion that it is the disparity between such self-glorifying views and the raw realities of life in Israel that explains the reluctance of American Jews to immigrate to the Jewish state. While some may indeed believe Jews to be "more advanced, more rational, and more morally refined than others," and that a Jewish state would consequently be better-run and more harmonious than other states, such views could not withstand even a cursory familiarity with ancient Jewish history as recounted in the Bible or, indeed, with involvement today in Jewish communal or religious organizations.

One possible explanation for the reluctance of American Jews to immigrate to Israel that Mr. Halkin does not consider is the perception that Israel offers little space in the religious spectrum between ultra-Orthodoxy and ultra-secularism. The absence in Israel of the middle ground of Reform and Conservative Judaism—with which the vast majority of synagogue-going American Jews are affiliated—may be far more of a barrier to *aliyah* than any outmoded notion of Jewish exceptionalism.

ROBERT LEVY  
*Swampscott, Massachusetts*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin says many interesting things about the somewhat strained relations between American Jews and their Israeli cousins, but he does not articulate what may be the most important point of all: that the main reason so many non-religious American Jews are adrift in terms of their Jewish identity is that they have no real organizational vehicles to nourish it.

For secular Jews, membership in any of the religious denominations of Judaism is at best a messy compromise designed to impart to the next generation a version of "tradition" and "identity" that the present generation has discarded. The two main secular variants of Jewish expression—Reconstructionism and Humanistic Judaism—have for their part not attracted passionate adherence among great numbers of American Jews, probably because they continue to pour the new wine of their secularism into the old flasks of ritual, prayer, and so on.

Perhaps, then, the energies of those concerned with the Jewish future who are of a broadly secular outlook, as Mr. Halkin clearly is, should focus less on the question of how Israeli and American Jews have failed each other and more on how a vast segment of American Jewry has failed itself by not constructing institutions and ideologies that truly express its identity.

ROBERT FORSTAG  
*Lakewood, Ohio*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin is surely right that the demise of the state of Israel would be equivalent to the destruc-

tion of the third Temple. But I wonder if he is not overly pessimistic in assuming that in the event of such an unthinkable calamity, a meaningful Judaism could no longer survive in the Diaspora. There is, after all, a flourishing Jewish culture in the United States. And while the yearning for Zion has been a part of Jewish tradition since the destruction of the second Temple, Jews have always managed to adapt, often brilliantly, to the lack of a national homeland.

HANS FISHER  
*Highland Park, New Jersey*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin writes that because of the large and growing population of Palestinians west of the Jordan River, "Israel's demise as a Jewish state could take place . . . by means of demographic swamping alone"—and this even if Israel were to withdraw "to, or nearly to, its 1967 borders."

The demographic problem is real, but there is a great deal of misinformation in the air about it. A recent study by the American-Israel Demographic Research Group (AIDRG) has shown that the Palestinian Authority has deliberately inflated its population figures to total over 3.3 million, while the actual figure is closer to the neighborhood of 2.4 million.

The AIDRG study, which was presented to Congress last year, also shows that the fertility rate for Israeli Jews stands at 2.75 children per woman, the highest in the industrialized world. While this is not expected to rise further by 2025, the Palestinian Arab birthrate is expected to drop to 2.4 by that date, following patterns

across the Middle East. In Israel proper, new welfare laws have led to a major drop in the Arab Bedouin birthrate while not affecting the birthrate among religious Jews. All in all, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics indicates that Jewish births in Israel have risen from 69 percent of the total in 1995 to 74 percent in 2006.

The findings of the AIDRG study have enormous implications. Chief among them is the fact that a sound 67-percent Jewish majority in 98.5 percent of the land west of the Jordan River (excluding Gaza) can be expected for the foreseeable future.

MORTON A. KLEIN  
*Zionist Organization of  
America  
New York City*

#### HILLEL HALKIN writes:

Hillel Asher and I are definitely living in the same country. Israel is indeed an extremely vibrant and rewarding place to reside in, even if its own citizens—Mr. Asher is something of an exception—tend to grumble about it constantly. But precisely this is one of the points I was making in my essay: life in a Jewish state will never seem good enough to anyone who harbors, however deep in his soul, a utopian notion of what such a state should be like. And as a people, Jews have been the world's greatest utopians because historically, they have been removed from the exercise of power, and able, therefore, to fantasize about how much better than others they would be at using power if they had it.

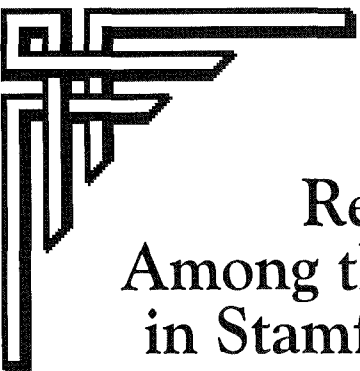
Apart from that, Mr. Asher seems to think that I wrote somewhere that the problems of Iran and of

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Palestinian demographics were "insurmountable." I did not, of course, say any such thing. I said that, if not surmounted, they could be extremely perilous for Israel's future. That is a very different statement.

I believe Peter Franklin that "millions of Americans," by which I presume he is referring to many non-Jews as well, "draw inspiration" from Israel. I know such non-Jewish Americans myself, and am deeply touched and encouraged by their good will. I would only say to them: Yes, do appreciate us, admire us, even love us—we deserve it. But do it for what we are, not for what we are not. Do not idealize, romanticize, or theologize us, because if you do, you will sooner or later feel let down by us.

Richard Samuelson misreads my essay. I did not complain about the fact that Jews in a Jewish state have turned out to be (with the proviso that all peoples, just like all individuals, are unique in their own way) "just like every other people." I celebrated this fact and expressed my regret that much of the world cannot accept it. Were it ever to become clear to me that God could not accept it, either, I would, I suppose, join the

laughter. Meanwhile, the secular Zionist aspiration of normality for the Jews in a country of their own still seems to me a worthy goal.

Mr. Samuelson also misreads me when he says that I do not blame American Jews for their failure to immigrate to Israel in larger numbers. I think this failure has been a colossal one, and I said so clearly. And in speculating that, if secular Israelis would only have the birthrate that observant Israelis have, Israel's demographic problems might be solved, Mr. Samuelson overlooks the fact that those observant Israelis with the highest birthrate, the ultra-Orthodox, do not serve in Israel's army, participate only marginally in its economy, depend heavily on the taxes of other Israelis to support them and their many children, and are on the whole more of a drain on the country's resources than a contribution to them. Emulating them is hardly the solution to Israel's demographic problem.

Robert Levy is putting the cart before the horse when he speaks of the absence of a religious "middle ground" as an obstacle to American Jewish immigration to Israel. There are

plenty of freely functioning Reform and Conservative congregations in Israel today, and the only reason there are not more is that there is no public demand for them and no inclination on the part of American Jewry to invest in them—a situation that would change if more American Jews lived in Israel. The notion that it is Israeli Orthodoxy that is preventing the emergence of Mr. Levy's middle ground is a myth. The state religious establishment is unpopular among nearly all secular and not a few religiously observant Israelis, and has no such power over Israeli life. And although, unlike Mr. Levy, I have never been involved in Jewish communal or religious organizations in the United States, it is my sense that many American Jews, especially those who are most active in Jewish life, do (or would like to) nurture a sense of Jewish intellectual and moral superiority, and are troubled not to find more evidence of it in Israel.

Contrary to Robert Forstag, I do not believe that American Jews are capable of developing a true secular culture independent of their religious institutions. In response to Hans Fisher I can only say that I explain in my essay why, in the absence of Israel, even a "flourishing" Jewish culture in the United States would be in my opinion historically uninteresting. I suggest that he re-read the passage in which I do so.

I am familiar with the population study of the American-Israel Demographic Research Group cited by Morton A. Klein, and I think its findings need to be taken seriously. It is important to realize, however,

that there are leading Israeli demographers who, for good reasons, challenge these findings in part or in whole. (To take just one example, the assumption that the Palestinian Arab birthrate will drop from its present level of roughly 4.5 children per family to 2.4 by 2025 strikes me as wildly optimistic.) But even if these findings are correct, Mr. Klein and I draw opposite conclusions from them. He thinks that an Israel with a 33 percent minority of hostile Palestinian Arabs would be a viable country. I think it would be a dysfunctional one in which ethnic animosities, ethnic politics, and the specter of ethnic warfare would overshadow all else.

### Among the Saudis

TO THE EDITOR:

I was pleased to meet Joshua Muravchik in Saudi Arabia, and I read the memoir of his trip with great interest ["My Saudi Sojourn," May]. Especially welcome for me was his remembrance of the victims of the 2004 attack by al Qaeda on the American consulate in Jeddah, but I would like to correct two small errors in his account.

Mr. Muravchik states that "four foreign nationals who worked [at the consulate] were slaughtered." In fact, five staff members—respectively from Sri Lanka, India, the Philippines, Yemen, and Sudan—were killed while protecting the consulate. An additional eleven people (including one American diplomat) were wounded.

Particular recognition must be given to one mem-

## Author's Query

For a history of *Commentary*, I would appreciate hearing from anyone with relevant letters, documents, or recollections.

Benjamin Balint  
Ha-Gdud Ha-Ivri 16/6  
Jerusalem, Israel  
benjamin.balint@gmail.com

ber of our Local Guard Force—Jaufar Sadik of Sri Lanka. Without protective cover, Sadik bravely returned fire from three terrorists who entered the compound of the consulate general. It was he—not a Marine guard, as Mr. Muravchik suggests—who killed the terrorist leader and prevented further carnage. Moments later, Sadik himself was killed by a fourth terrorist who came from behind and shot him fatally in the head.

I should also note that the Saudi security forces at the consulate demonstrated similar bravery. Three guards were killed and two wounded in the effort to recapture the compound from the terrorists.

**TATIANA C. GFOELLER**  
*U.S. Consul General*  
*Jeddah, Saudi Arabia*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

It can only be salutary that Joshua Muravchik has finally visited Saudi Arabia, and been able to see for himself that the Saudis are not scimitar-waving monsters looking for infidels to behead. He seems to have learned quite a lot during his stay, and I commend COMMENTARY for publishing his findings.

Readers of Mr. Muravchik's account, however, might have been better served if he had done a bit more homework before undertaking his trip. It is unfortunate that he begins his article by expressing surprise that a Jew could obtain an entry visa. It is true that Saudi Arabia once excluded Jews from its borders, but that taboo was broken by Henry Kissinger in 1974, and the State Department assigned Jewish diplomats to the kingdom shortly after that.

Dozens of Jewish journalists, officials, and communal leaders have been granted visas since then, and the entire subject has not been an issue since the late 1980's.

The government of Saudi Arabia made a deliberate policy decision in the late 1980's to end an estrangement from American Jews that was not doing either side any good. The person chosen to lead the campaign of outreach to American Jews was Adel al-Jubair, then a young diplomat on the staff of Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi ambassador in Washington. Al-Jubair was so successful that he became known informally as the "ambassador to the Jews." Today, of course, he is himself the ambassador in Washington.

**THOMAS LIPPMAN**  
*Washington, D.C.*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Joshua Muravchik's account of his journey to Saudi Arabia brought back memories of a U.S.-government-sponsored trip I took to the kingdom in 1981. While there, I asked my escort from the American embassy in Riyadh to translate the text of my visa. It turned out that while in my application I had listed "Jewish" as my religion, the Saudi embassy in Washington had apparently substituted the Arabic word for "none." Interestingly, too, many Saudis that I met stopped at my name: "Steinberg," they would muse, "is that Jewish?" When I affirmed that it was, they professed nonchalance. Invariably, however, came the tough follow-up question: "But are you a Zionist?"

I gather from Mr. Muravchik's anecdotes that Saudi Arabia has modernized

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significantly since the 1980's. During my visit, I was detained briefly by police for snapping a photograph of a playful boy on a street in Riyadh. At the Intercontinental Hotel, where I stayed, the pool was used only by male guests, and the housekeeping staff was all male. At homes that I visited (where the hospitality was effusive), there was a separate living room for each sex. I was invited one afternoon to a public square to witness the administration of some kind of corporal punishment. At the outdoor marketplace where I opted to spend the time instead, I saw gem merchants leave expensive merchandise unattended—few worries about stealing, apparently. New cars would be abandoned in the desert for the slightest malfunction because auto dealerships were not yet able to service what they sold. There were none of the fast-food franchises and tabloids that Mr. Muravchik saw in such abundance.

In general, I find that today's Saudi leaders are increasingly pragmatic. But only time will tell how well

they will be able to navigate between the country's intolerant religious base and the young moderns who accept Western influence and even the existence of Israel.

ARNOLD STEINBERG  
*Calabasas, California*

TO THE EDITOR:

Joshua Muravchik's reflections on his sojourn in Saudi Arabia as a Jew brought to mind a legend about the architect Gordon Bunshaft, who worked for many years with the firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and whose many distinguished designs include New York's Lever House (1951) and Washington's Hirshhorn Museum (1974). In the 1970's, Bunshaft was commissioned to work on the Hajj Terminal and the National Commercial Bank in Saudi Arabia. But Bunshaft was also a Jew, and according to the legend never laid eyes on either building.

BRIAN LEVITE  
*Washington, D.C.*

TO THE EDITOR:

I was taken aback by Joshua Muravchik's com-

ment about being in Saudi Arabia among veiled women: "For me, beer or wine with dinner and the chance to admire the beauty of women are among life's quotidian joys; I missed them." If this is his approach to women—as objects to be admired—maybe it is just as well that they cover themselves!

It would seem that both Mr. Muravchik and those who would mandate the *hijab* feel that men can only respond to women sexually. Those of us who find this kind of covering inherently problematic have more (misplaced?) confidence in men; we hope that they can see women as people who make contributions to society beyond their looks.

LINA ZERBARINI  
*New Haven, Connecticut*

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK writes:

I thank Tatiana C. Gfoeller for correcting and adding to my account of the attack on the U.S. consulate in Jeddah, and for using the occasion to pay homage to the brave employees who were its victims.

I thank Thomas Lippman for the information he provides, despite his condescension, but I fear the story is not as clear as he would have it. At least some Jewish members of the U.S. diplomatic staff in Saudi Arabia do not reveal their religion for fear that this would hinder their work. A number of Saudis with whom I spoke were under the impression that Jews had not been admitted to the kingdom until a short time ago. And as recently as 2004, a Saudi government website set up to provide visa information specified that Jews were not eligible. The offending clause was soon removed, and Saudi officials said that it had been a mistake. But apparently I am not the only one—see also the letters of Arnold Steinberg and Brian Levite—who has been confused about the matter of Saudi Arabia and the Jews.

To Lina Zerbarini I would submit that there is no contradiction in respecting women for the full range of their talents and accomplishments while also thinking of them as the fairer sex.

## The Past, Present, and Future of Neoconservatism

Joshua Muravchik

HAVE AMERICA's troubles in Iraq sounded the death knell of neoconservatism, the political ideology that is said to be behind our presence there? Over the past year, there has been no shortage of voices saying so, many with undisguised glee. Abroad, the *Times* of London heralded "the end of an ideological era in Washington," while the *Toronto Globe and Mail* reported with satisfaction that neoconservatism has been "decisively wiped out." Observers here at home have agreed. To the historian Douglas Brinkley, Democratic electoral victories in November 2006 spelled "the death of the neoconservative movement," while at *National Review Online* John Derbyshire wrote that "all the buzz is that neoconservatism is as dead as mutton."

Prognoses from within neoconservatism's ranks have been correspondingly grim. Kenneth Adelman, an author and sometime defense official in Republican administrations, has lamented that "most everything we ever stood for now . . . lies in ruins." Francis Fukuyama, in a short book excerpted in the *New York Times Magazine*, took leave of his own sometime affiliation with neoconservatism, protesting that it had "evolved into something that I can no longer support." Jonah Gold-

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK, a longtime contributor to COMMENTARY, is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and the author of *Exporting Democracy, Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism, and The Future of the United Nations. He is working on a book about Arab and Muslim democrats.*

berg, a columnist at *National Review*, despaired that the word neoconservatism itself has become "useless, spent."

But more than a word is at issue. The opprobrium lately faced by neoconservatism flows from a number of entwined propositions: that its ideas shaped President George W. Bush's war against terrorism; that the ensuing policy has failed disastrously; and that this failure demonstrates the illusions and delusions embodied in those ideas. This indictment must either be accepted or answered, and the exercise must begin by identifying the ideas in question. That requires revisiting history that has been told before.

THE TERM "neoconservative" was coined in the 1970's as an anathema. It was intended to stigmatize a group of liberal intellectuals who had lately parted ways with the majority of their fellows.

As a heretical offshoot of liberalism, neoconservatism appealed to the same values and even many of the same goals—like, for example, peace and racial equality. But neoconservatives argued that liberal policies—for example, disarmament in the pursuit of peace, or affirmative action in the pursuit of racial equality—undermined those goals rather than advancing them. In short order, the heretics established themselves as contemporary liberalism's most formidable foes.

Two distinct currents fed the stream of neoconservatism. One focused on domestic issues, specif-

ically by reexamining the Great Society programs of the 1960's and the welfare state as a whole. It was centered in the *Public Interest*, a quarterly founded and edited by Irving Kristol. The other focused on international issues and the cold war; it was centered in COMMENTARY and led by the magazine's editor, Norman Podhoretz.

The former current has little if any relevance to the controversy surrounding neoconservatism today. Much of the domestic-policy critique mounted by neoconservatives eventually became common wisdom, symbolized by President Bill Clinton's welfare-reform program and his declaration that "the era of big government is over." In the meantime, several of the seminal figures of the domestic wing—Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Daniel Bell, and Nathan Glazer—drifted back toward liberalism.

It was the foreign-policy wing that was, all along, more passionately embroiled in ideological disputation.\* For one thing, the stakes were higher. If a domestic policy fails, you can try another. If a foreign policy fails, you may find yourself at war. Also, the battles that rived the Democratic party in the 1970's, at a time when virtually all neoconservatives were still Democrats, principally concerned foreign affairs. These battles sharpened ideological talons on all sides.

The divisions stemmed from the Vietnam war. Not that all neoconservatives were hawks on this particular issue; some, including Podhoretz, were (qualified) doves. But when opponents of the war went from arguing that it was a failed instance of an essentially correct policy—namely, resisting Communist expansionism—to contending that it was a symptom of a deep American sickness, neoconservatives answered back. Whatever problems we may have made for ourselves in Vietnam, they said, the origins of the conflict were to be found neither in American imperialism nor in what President Jimmy Carter would call our "inordinate fear of Communism," but in Communism's lust to dominate.

Contrary to Carter and the antiwar Left, neoconservatives believed that Communism was very much to be feared, to be detested, and to be opposed. They saw the Soviet Union as, in the words of Ronald Reagan, an "evil empire," unspeakably cruel to its own subjects and relentlessly predatory toward those not yet in its grasp. They took the point of George Orwell's *1984*—a book that (as the Irish scholars James McNamara and Dennis J. O'Keefe have written) resurrected the idea of evil "as a political category." And they absorbed the cautionary warning of the Russian novelist and dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn against yielding

ground to the Communists in the vain hope "that perhaps at some point the wolf will have eaten enough."

Many in our history, both statesmen and scholars, had drawn a distinction between Americans' sentiments and America's self-interest. Where Communism was concerned, the neoconservatives saw the two as intertwined. Communism needed to be fought both because it was morally appalling and because it was a threat to our country.

FOR THEIR passion against Communism, neoconservatives were accused of being "zealots" and "Manicheans." To this, one neoconservative rejoined: "we face a Manichean reality." That is to say, the struggle between the Communist world and the West involved, on the one hand, some of the most malign, murderous regimes ever created and, on the other hand, some of the most humane. The moral consequences were enormous.

This attitude was one of the things that set neoconservatives apart from traditional conservatives. To be sure, there were a few intellectuals of the Right, like William F. Buckley, Jr. and Whittaker Chambers, who shared the neoconservatives' loathing for Communism. But mainstream conservatives were better represented by the approach of Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford and their foreign-policy mentor, Henry Kissinger, according to which the Soviet Union was to be seen more as another great power than as the vessel of a lethal ideology; the policy of détente was devised accordingly. This approach was embraced by such conservative icons as the Reverend Billy Graham, who hoped to convert Russians to the Gospel, and the capitalist Donald Kendall, who hoped to sell them Pepsi—without, in either case, troubling with the issue of their enslavement.

Even those traditional conservatives who distrusted the readiness of Nixon and Kissinger to make deals with the Soviet Union tended to share the underlying philosophy of foreign-policy "realism." As opposed to the neoconservative emphasis on the battle of ideas and ideologies, and on the psychological impact of policy choices, realists focused on state interests and the time-honored tools of statecraft. That was one reason why, for the neo-

\* Irving Kristol is often referred to as the "godfather" of neoconservatism. Though this may capture his role in shaping the domestic side, it has been a source of confusion when it comes to neoconservative ideas on foreign policy. Although outspoken on this subject, Kristol has more often positioned himself with traditional conservatives than with other neoconservatives. For example, he opposed the Reagan policies of supporting anti-Communist guerrillas and of promoting democracy abroad, on which more below.

conservatives of the 1970's, the great champions in American political life were not conservative or Republican figures but two Democrats of unmistakably liberal pedigree: Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson and George Meany, the president of the AFL-CIO. When President Ford, on Kissinger's counsel, closed the White House door to Solzhenitsyn upon his expulsion from Soviet Russia, these two stalwart anti-Communists formally welcomed him to Washington.

It was only with the accession of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1981 that the neoconservatives made their peace with Republican-style conservatism. Reagan brought several neoconservatives—notably Jeane Kirkpatrick, Richard Perle, Max Kampelman, and Elliott Abrams—into pivotal foreign-policy positions in his administration (and, on the domestic-policy side, William J. Bennett and others). With time, most neoconservatives moved into the Republican fold. As for Reagan's "belligerent" approach to the cold war, it was criticized as loudly by both liberals and conservatives within the foreign-policy establishment as it was cheered by neoconservatives. But there can be no question that it issued in a sublime victory: the mighty juggernaut of the Soviet state, disposing of more kill power than the U.S. or any other state in history, capitulated with scarcely a shot.

BY THE 1990's, therefore, the neoconservatives' analysis seemed vindicated. But, by the same token, the cause that had drawn them together and defined them—the cold war—was concluded. In the relatively quiet 1990's, most of the nation's attention was concentrated on taxes and budgets and other domestic concerns. By 1996, Podhoretz himself proclaimed that neoconservatism was "dead," and that "what killed it was not defeat but victory; it died not of failure but of success." As a consequence, he wrote, "in foreign policy it has become impossible to define a neoconservative position."

This, in my judgment, underestimated the signs that a distinctive neoconservative approach to post-cold-war foreign policy had already been taking form. In 1990-91, cold-war neoconservatives lined up with traditional conservatives serving in the first Bush administration in support of military action to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. At the time, most liberals opposed the use of force, and so did some so-called paleoconservatives like Patrick J. Buchanan and Robert Novak, as well as various libertarians.

No less revealing than the debates between the war's opponents and supporters was a division that

opened within the ranks of the supporters themselves once the fighting ended. In an act of quintessential "realism," President Bush declined to order American forces to capture Baghdad and oust Saddam Hussein or even to obstruct Saddam's campaign to suppress Iraqis who had risen in rebellion against him. Most neoconservatives disagreed with at least the latter of these decisions.

In 1992, the Bush administration's realism got the better of it once again when war broke out in Bosnia. The President dismissed the violence there as a "hiccup," and James Baker, his Secretary of State, famously declared that "we have no dog in that fight." When the new Clinton administration proved equally inert, and with the death toll mounting, a lobby developed for some form of American intervention.

Most active members of that lobby were neoconservatives, and other neoconservatives, with notable exceptions like Charles Krauthammer, embraced its position. By contrast, most traditional conservatives believed that America's own interests were not sufficiently engaged to justify intervention. Many liberals, for their part, while sharing a sense of urgency about Bosnia, were characteristically chary of using force or acting outside the aegis of the United Nations (whose actions, as it happened, had been constraining the victims of aggression more than the aggressors).

After Bosnia, the top foreign-policy issue in the latter half of the 1990's was the enlargement of NATO. Liberals and conservatives were arrayed on all sides. But most of those associated with the neoconservative camp, with the prominent exception of the historian Richard Pipes, were united in favor of it. I worked with Jeane Kirkpatrick and Paul Wolfowitz (and two moderate Democrats, Anthony Lake and Richard Holbrooke) to organize a statement, signed by most of America's former top foreign-affairs officials, that helped to seal the debate.

THIS SERIES of events suggests that some kind of common neoconservative mentality endured beyond the cold war. What were its elements?

First, following Orwell, neoconservatives were moralists. Just as they despised Communism, they felt similarly toward Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic and toward the acts of aggression committed by those dictators in, respectively, Kuwait and Bosnia. And just as they did not hesitate to enter negative moral judgments, neither did they hesitate to enter positive ones. In particular, they were strong admirers of the American experi-

ence—an admiration that arose not out of an unexamined patriotism (they had all started out as reformers or even as radical critics of American society) but out of the recognition that America had gone farther in the realization of liberal values than any other society in history. A corollary was the belief that America was a force for good in the world at large.

Second, in common with many liberals, neoconservatives were internationalists, and not only for moral reasons. Following Churchill, they believed that depredations tolerated in one place were likely to be repeated elsewhere—and, conversely, that beneficent political or economic policies exercised their own “domino effect” for the good. Since America’s security could be affected by events far from home, it was wiser to confront troubles early even if afar than to wait for them to ripen and grow nearer.

Third, neoconservatives, like (in this case) most conservatives, trusted in the efficacy of military force. They doubted that economic sanctions or UN intervention or diplomacy, *per se*, constituted meaningful alternatives for confronting evil or any determined adversary.

To this list, I would add a fourth tenet: namely, the belief in democracy both at home and abroad. This conviction could not be said to have emerged from the issues of the 1990’s, although the neoconservative support for enlarging NATO owed something to the thought that enlargement would cement the democratic transformations taking place in the former Soviet satellites. But as early as 1982, Ronald Reagan, the neoconservative hero, had stamped democratization on America’s foreign-policy agenda with a forceful speech to the British Parliament. In contrast to the Carter administration, which held (in the words of Patricia Derian, Carter’s Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights) that “human-rights violations do not really have very much to do with the form of government,” the Reagan administration saw the struggle for human rights as intimately bound up in the struggle to foster democratic governance. When Reagan’s Westminster speech led to the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy, the man chosen to lead it was Carl Gershman, a onetime Social Democrat and a frequent contributor to COMMENTARY. Although not an avowed neoconservative, he was of a similar cast of mind.

This mix of opinions and attitudes still constitutes the neoconservative mindset. The military historian Max Boot has aptly labeled it “hard Wilsonianism.” It does not mesh neatly with the familiar di-

chotomy between “realists” and “idealists.” It is indeed idealistic in its internationalism and its faith in democracy and freedom, but it is hardheaded, not to say jaundiced, in its image of our adversaries and its assessment of international organizations. Nor is its idealism to be confused with the idealism of the “peace” camp. Over the course of the past century, various schemes for keeping the peace—the League of Nations, the UN, the treaty to outlaw war, arms-control regimes—have all proved fatuous. In the meantime, what has in fact kept the peace (when-ever it has been kept) is something quite different: strength, alliances, and deterrence. Also in the meantime, “idealistic” schemes for promoting not peace but freedom—self-determination for European peoples after World War I, decolonization after World War II, the democratization of Germany, Japan, Italy, and Austria, the global advocacy of human rights—have brought substantial and beneficial results.

WHETHER OR not a distinct neoconservative position could be discerned in the relatively calm 1990’s, everything changed, with a vengeance, after September 11, 2001. As the second President Bush unfurled his “war against terror,” word spread that he himself had been captured by neoconservatives. What gave plausibility to this idea was that Bush’s new approach constituted a radical break with his own earlier predilections. Less than a year before, he had come into office evincing little interest in international affairs and proclaiming that America should be a “humble nation,” with fewer global commitments. No more than a handful of identifiable neoconservatives occupied influential positions in his administration, and none at the highest tier.

There was unintended irony in the post-9/11 liberal caricature of Bush and Cheney as politicians who had haplessly allowed their administration’s policies to be hijacked by a few spookily effective intellectuals—this, less than a year after having been such master manipulators as to have allegedly stolen away the presidency from Al Gore. But this was not the only grotesque charge leveled at the President. Another was that the “neoconservatives” in question were in reality a group of Jews who were attempting to divert U.S. policy in the interests of Israel. This particular bit of slander ignored, among other things, the fact that the neoconservative position on the Middle East conflict was exactly congruous with the neoconservative position on conflicts everywhere else in the world, including places where neither Jews nor Israeli interests

could be found—not to mention the fact that *non-Jewish* neoconservatives took the same stands on all of the issues as did their Jewish confrères.\*

However fantastical the conspiracy theories, and however polluted their origins, what is undeniable is that Bush's declaration of war against terrorism did bear the earmarks of neoconservatism. One can count the ways. It was moralistic, accompanied by descriptions of the enemy as "evil" and strong assertions of America's righteousness. As Norman Podhoretz puts it in his powerful new book,<sup>†</sup> Bush offered "an entirely unapologetic assertion of the need for and the possibility of moral judgment in the realm of world affairs." In contrast to the suggestion of many, especially many Europeans, that America had somehow provoked the attacks, Bush held that what the terrorists hated was our virtues, and in particular our freedom. His approach was internationalist: it treated the whole globe as the battlefield, and sought to confront the enemy far from our own doorstep. It entailed the prodigious use of force. And, for the non-military side of the strategy, Bush adopted the idea of promoting democracy in the Middle East in the hope that this would drain the fever swamps that bred terrorists.

It is possible that Bush and Cheney turned to neoconservative sources for guidance on these matters; it is also possible, and more likely, that they reached similar conclusions on their own. In either case, the war against terrorism put neoconservative ideas to the test—and, in the war's early stages, they passed with flying colors. The Taliban regime was ousted from Afghanistan quickly and without a major commitment of American forces. More striking still, a democratic government was established in Afghanistan—one of the least likely places on earth for it. Muammar Qaddafi, the ruler of Libya and one of the world's most erratic and violent dictators, abandoned his pursuit of nuclear weapons, and in effect sued to bring his country in from the cold reaches to which Bush had assigned terrorism-supporting states. Finally, Saddam Hussein was toppled from power in a brief campaign with minimum loss of life.

Even more remarkably, Bush's advocacy of democracy brought an immediate and positive reaction around the region. The Lebanese drove out Syrian forces after a 30-year occupation. In an unprecedented development, elections at various levels of government were held in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and a handful of other Arab states (and the Palestinian Authority), including most dramatically Iraq itself. The collective leadership of the Arab states, meeting at a summit, declared its com-

mitment to "strengthening democracy, expanding political participation, consolidating the values of citizenship and the culture of democracy, the promotion of human rights, the opening of space for civil society, and enabling women to play a prominent role in every field of public life."

Crowning all these events was one crucial non-event: the absence, despite the almost unanimous forecast of experts, of further terror attacks on the United States.

**B**UT THEN, of course, the landscape shifted. Resistance and terror mounted in Iraq to levels that the U.S. and allied forces could not manage, and the entire war against terrorism bogged down. Not only did Iraq itself devolve into a bloody mess, but gains on other fronts also began to fray. The Taliban intensified terror and guerrilla attacks in Afghanistan, Syria launched new depredations in Lebanon, Iran defiantly accelerated its drive for a nuclear bomb, and autocrats around the Middle East reneged on their pledges of democratic reform. The American public, originally supportive, turned against the Iraq war. Bush's popularity plummeted.

Today there are signs that the "surge" of U.S. troop levels and the new counterinsurgency tactics designed by General David Petraeus will succeed in stabilizing Iraq, provided they are not aborted by congressional Democrats who, as the British writer Douglas Murray has put it, "want the neoconservatives to fail more than they want Iraq to succeed"—or, more accurately and more disgracefully, who want Bush to fail more than they want America to succeed. Even so, it cannot be denied that the war has proved far costlier in treasure, lives, and American standing than its proponents imagined, and, at least for the time being, the loftier dream of Iraq as a model for its neighbors has turned to ashes.

But to what is all this to be attributed? According to one highly publicized article in *Vanity Fair*, several leading neoconservatives put the blame on poor execution of their ideas on the part of the administration. This is not a very satisfying analysis. Complaints about government incompetence dog every administration, almost always with justice, and there is no convincing evidence that the functioning of the present administration has been worse than that of its predecessors.

\* For a fuller account, see my "The Neoconservative Cabal," in COMMENTARY, September 2003. Although Jews often dominate liberal political causes, one never hears them attacked by their opponents on the Right in the anti-Semitic terms used freely by the Left.

† *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism*. Doubleday, 230 pp., \$24.95.

More specific and more convincing targets for blame are a few key decisions made by Paul Bremer, the chief of the allied occupation from May 2003 to June 2004, and by former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Bremer's decisions—to disband the Iraqi army and to undertake a purge of Baath party members so sweeping as to dismantle the Iraqi government—have been widely criticized. Whether it would otherwise have been easier to cope with the insurgency is hard to say, though the idea seems plausible. Rumsfeld's insistence, backed by the President, on deploying to Iraq only a fraction of the troops requested by General Eric Shinseki, the Army Chief of Staff, seems more clearly to have courted trouble—a conclusion brought home all the more sharply by the apparent success of today's "surge" in manpower.

In any event, the decisions about troop levels and about abolishing Iraq's existing administrative structure had nothing to do with neoconservative ideas. The most that can fairly be said is that Rumsfeld was an ally of neoconservatives and that some among them, enamored of military technology or influenced by the Iraqi dissident Ahmad Chalabi, endorsed his choices. Besides, whatever measure of responsibility may be placed on neoconservatives in this one matter, it pales in comparison to the errors of the realists in the George H.W. Bush administration who in 1991 chose to leave Saddam in power, and of the liberals in the Clinton administration who allowed Saddam's defiance of his disarmament obligations to swell steadily over eight long years. Together, these failures left the problem of Saddam Hussein festering for George W. Bush to confront in the aftermath of 9/11, when it appeared in a more ominous light.

TO POINT TO an insufficiency of troops or to errors by Paul Bremer is of course no answer to more searching questions about the wisdom of the war itself. At the outset, liberal critics—initially there were more of them abroad than at home—argued that UN inspectors should have been given more time to find Saddam's hidden weapons of mass destruction, and that the U.S. should not have gone to war without the approval of the Security Council.

But the inspectors had been at their mission for twelve years, and there was no reason to believe they would ever accomplish it. As we later discovered, the Iraqi regime had apparently destroyed its stocks of biological and chemical agents and concealed or destroyed the evidence it had done so, or failed to make a record in the first place. Why Sad-

dam would have deliberately invited the suspicion that he still possessed such materials remains the war's great mystery—probably he did not want his enemies *or* his friends to know the actual state of affairs—but whatever the final truth may be, the inspectors were unlikely to have discovered it.

As for the Security Council, here we do hit on one of the signature issues of neoconservatism. Although neoconservatives are not necessarily unilateralists, they are certainly and pointedly distrustful of the UN (as are traditional conservatives). And they have reason to be.

America's decision to invade Iraq after failing to secure the support of the Security Council cost it dearly in the coin of world public opinion. But should we resort to war only upon the Security Council's approval? Although some Europeans have articulated such a principle, in 1999, when Russia stood in the way of UN-approved military strikes against Serbia over the issue of Kosovo, NATO went ahead and bombed anyway, and all nineteen members took part. Surely, the stakes in Iraq were far higher than in Kosovo, even in purely humanitarian terms, all the more so in strategic.

Although the UN Charter gives the Security Council a near-monopoly on the use of force, that same charter also envisioned a mighty UN army that would protect every member against attack or even threat. In return for this protection, the member states were to sacrifice much of their freedom to defend their own interests. But the army never came into being, so this part of the charter is a dead letter. Surely states cannot have surrendered most of their right to defend themselves once the other half of the bargain became null and void.

But arguments over the UN and the Security Council are only the tip of an iceberg. The larger and more general issue is how readily America should resort to the use of force and whether neoconservatives are too promiscuous or "trigger-happy" in this regard. Liberal critics of the war, who grew more assertive and numerous as our effort in Iraq bogged down, reprised the dovish positions of the past 30 years. Over the course of those decades, the likes of Carl Levin and Edward Kennedy and Nancy Pelosi had opposed virtually every new U.S. weapons system and every stout anti-Communist policy—in other words, the very measures that led to victory in the cold war. They also opposed the 1991 Gulf war to force Saddam out of Kuwait, and military action against Serbia in Bosnia. Never once did they acknowledge error or revisit their own mistaken judgments, although in each case the neoconservative critique of those

judgments was proved right. Are we now to suppose that, whatever may have gone wrong so far in Iraq, we can vanquish the forces of terrorism by restricting ourselves to the liberals' favored instruments—diplomacy, foreign aid, and the UN?

ON THE other side of the ideological spectrum, some conservative critics of the war have argued that we went to Iraq in pursuit of the wrong mission—that is, democratization. As Charles R. Kesler, the editor of the *Claremont Review of Books*, puts it: “the case for toppling Saddam was much stronger than the one for staying indefinitely to buy time for the Iraqis to democratize.” And this, too, touches a signature neoconservative issue.

It is hard to picture what would be better today, either for the Iraqis or for us and our interests, had we just deposed Saddam and left. Numerous scenarios are imaginable, all of them grisly. Saddam might have been succeeded by one of his equally bloody henchmen, like the infamous “Chemical Ali.” An ethnically-based civil war might have broken out, or the country might have devolved into anarchy like Somalia, except with infinitely more weapons available. Or Iraq’s neighbors might have torn it to pieces, with the largest piece consumed by Iran.

Perhaps Kesler envisions that we could have installed a benign dictator. This thought is not far from that of some neoconservatives themselves, who believe that we would have done better to place Ahmad Chalabi in power. But whether it would have been Chalabi or Ayad Allawi (who served briefly as prime minister) or some other Iraqi to our liking, this would not have reduced our own burdens a whit. No such figure could have remained in power unless we shouldered the job of preserving him by force. To the contrary, the measure of democracy that *has* taken hold in Iraq—along with the degree of legitimacy, however attenuated, that this has given to both the Iraqi authorities and our own continued presence—has made our burdens there so much the lighter.

Indeed, what with high voter participation and a degree of give-and-take among the various factions, democratization can be said to have received a decent start in Iraq. To be sure, the functioning of the Iraqi government has been inadequate, but more mature democracies have also faltered under the pressures of war and terror. In the meantime, government on the local level, at least in areas relatively free of violence, seems to be functioning. What is apparent is that most Iraqis want democracy, but their wishes are hostage to a sizable mi-

nority of violent recalcitrants, backed by outside force.

A more profound criticism of the war in Iraq is that it was the wrong war in the wrong *place*. By attacking Iraq, so it has been said, Bush diverted us from completing the vital mission of pacifying Afghanistan and tracking down Osama bin Laden. This critique, which became another staple of Democratic argument, has the advantage of sounding tough even while opposing the war. Barack Obama revealed a new variation of the theme when, in August, he announced that he would support bombing terrorist targets in Pakistan.

But what good would it have done to have had tens of thousands more U.S. troops in Afghanistan? From the perspective of “nation building” and other humanitarian concerns, Afghanistan after the removal of the Taliban was doing well—for Afghanistan. A thousand things were wrong, but that poor and undeveloped country was progressing better than at any other time in memory. From a strategic perspective, perhaps a larger American force could have suppressed Taliban guerrilla activity more completely, but was this a mission for which we should have tied down the lion’s share of our deployable forces?

And what of bin Laden? By all accounts, he is not in Afghanistan but in Pakistan. There is still talk of U.S. forces attacking the tribal areas where he is believed to shelter, but this would be another nettlesome project. It would entail great military risk—Pakistan’s own army has done poorly in the region—and would possibly destabilize the world’s second largest Muslim country, a country that contains both a nuclear arsenal and large numbers of extremists. Obama’s hypothetical bombing attack would more likely result in mayhem than in the death of bin Laden.

A MORE serious version of the “wrong place” argument came from within the neoconservative camp itself, and specifically from Michael Ledeen of the American Enterprise Institute. He argued in 2003 that we should focus not on Iraq but on Iran.

A key goal in the larger war against terrorism has been to put an end to state support for terrorists either by inducing state sponsors to mend their ways or by bringing about their downfall. Among these sponsors and/or perpetrators, the most active have been Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Libya.

All four are brutally repressive of their own citizens and opponents of regional peace. All have attempted to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

All embrace radical anti-Western philosophies, secular or Islamist. And all have been in place for decades. It seemed a sensible strategy to use force against one in the hope that this would precipitate the desired outcome in the others.

The administration did not spell out its rationale for choosing Iraq, but it is possible to imagine the reasons. In Iran, internal dissidents and reformers seemed far stronger at the time than they do today, and there were grounds for hoping they might change the government on their own. Hitting Syria first, the choice of some neoconservatives, might have reinforced the canard that we were acting on Israel's behalf and thus sparked an even stormier backlash in the Arab world than what we have suffered over Iraq. Libya had been quiescent since Reagan bombed the country in 1986 in response to a terrorist outrage.

The choice of Iraq as a target had another comparative advantage, a particularly ironic one in light of the subsequent charge by Kofi Annan (among others) that the war was "illegal." Actually, there was a clear justification in international law for using force against Iraq, and it did not rest primarily on the administration's controversial interpretation of the traditional right of preemptive self-defense. It rested on Saddam's own willful defiance of the terms and conditions ending the 1991 war he had launched by invading Kuwait.

In hindsight, was Ledeer right? After all, Iran is closer to having a nuclear bomb than Iraq seems to have been, and it has always been the greater supporter of terrorism. Moreover, our difficulties in Iraq have left an opening for Iran to bid for regional hegemony. But if it was indeed a mistake to concentrate on Iraq first, the mistake had nothing to do with neoconservatism. Rather, it was the kind of strategic error that abounds in war. In World War I, our side may have concentrated too much on the central front; in World War II, too much on the periphery. In the cold war, we met disaster in Vietnam, where we either should not have fought or should not have allowed ourselves to lose. In each case, however, we won the larger war.

In sum, the most persuasive criticisms of the Iraq war—that we sent too small a force, that we erred in dismantling the Iraqi state, that we would have been wiser to concentrate on Iran—do nothing to impeach neoconservatism. And as for the criticisms that do aim at the distinctly neoconservative tenets of the war—that we should have deferred to the UN, that we should have avoided resorting to force, that we should not have tried to bring democracy to Iraq—none is persuasive.

IN THE END, the validity of the neoconservative position, or for that matter of the indictment against it, rests on two issues that go beyond Iraq: whether and how the U.S. should try to spread democracy in the Middle East, and whether we should be engaged in a war against terrorism.

On the first count, Francis Fukuyama has explained his disaffection from neoconservatism on the grounds that, in contrast to his own, "Marxist" approach to democratization, his former friends and allies had behaved like "Leninists." By this he means to separate his analysis in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) from the policies to which that analysis seminally contributed. In writing about the "end of history," Fukuyama now says, he was only attempting to discover the historical laws that, sooner or later, would lead all nations to democracy. But just as Lenin took matters into his own hands when he tired of waiting for Marx's predicted revolution, so had the neoconservatives tried, fatally, to force the pace of democratization.

The analogy may be catchy, but it is flawed. The socialism envisioned by Marx was a fantasy, which came true neither by natural evolution nor by Lenin's violence. Democracy, on the other hand, is the method by which governments are chosen today in about two-thirds of the countries of the world, and this is something that has come about via both the "Marxist" and the "Leninist" paths. In the technologically advanced countries of Europe, democracy in the postwar era may arguably have developed organically, as the outgrowth of socioeconomic development. But the majority of today's democracies are not technologically advanced; democracy came to them because people wanted it and worked or fought for it. In other words, it has been a product of individual choice and will. And though most of its proponents have been indigenous, outsiders have often played influential roles.

In fact, even in the advanced countries, postwar democracy did not just unfold naturally. There, too, it came with the help of various kinds of foreign intervention, whether it was the Allied occupations of Germany, Japan, and Austria, or the CIA's interventions in the politics of Italy and France, or the role played by the Marshall Plan across Western Europe. For that matter, America's own democracy was born with outside assistance from the likes of Lafayette and the government of France. It turns out that we are all "Leninists."

The strategy of promoting democracy in the Middle East flowed from Bush's realization that the war against terror could not be won by military means alone. Bush eschewed the old cliché that the

"root cause" of terror was poverty, a theory always contradicted by the available evidence and one that should have received its final blow this past summer from the appearance of a cell of terrorist physicians in the United Kingdom. Instead, Bush hypothesized that the root cause was the political culture of the Muslim Middle East, which is steeped in violence. This political culture has incubated thousands of young men ready to die for the joy of killing and tens of millions of citizens ready to applaud their "martyrdom." Bush's thesis was, and is, that the Middle East can be brought to partake in the global tide of democratization that has touched every other region, and that such democratization will lead to new ways of thinking and make violence less acceptable.

Neither Bush nor anyone else can know if this strategy will work. There are two obvious areas of uncertainty. One has been expressed well by Kesler:

The conspicuous exception to democracy's spread was the Arab Middle East. That could have meant, as the neoconservatives concluded, that its turn was next. But it could also have meant that there were cultural, religious, and political factors that had made it resistant to the democratic wave—and would continue to do so.

Kesler here makes the neoconservatives sound more assertive and uniform than I think is fair, but he is certainly right that we do not know whether Arabs will in fact embrace democracy any time soon or, for that matter, ever. And we also do not know—we can only suppose and hope—that if they do, democracy will work to pacify Arab political culture. That is the second uncertainty.

Was it irresponsible of Bush to rest such weighty national concerns on an unproved supposition? It *would* have been irresponsible had there been any better-tested or more plausible alternatives available. But none has yet been suggested, unless one counts those who persist in believing that stronger U.S. efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict will solve everything else. (If that were the case, attacks on America should have subsided during the 1990's, the decade of our most vigorous efforts to broker just such a peace; instead, they crescendoed.)

Thus far, Bush's strategy has scored some steps forward and some back. All in all, as Freedom House reported this year, "the Middle East continues to lag behind other regions in the development of free institutions." But, the Freedom House report immediately continues, "the fact that progress

has been made since the September 11, 2001 attacks gives some cause for optimism." Although no country in the region (apart from Israel) can be judged "free," the number counted as "partly free" (as opposed to "not free") has risen from 3 to 6 (or 7 if one counts the Palestinian Authority). If appreciable progress is to come, it will require more years, which is why Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice speaks of "a generational commitment."

**I**F BUSH's strategy of spreading democracy bears a neoconservative imprimatur, it is not the largest issue on which neoconservatism stands or falls. That issue is the war against terrorism itself. According to the financier George Soros, among many others, terrorism ought to be viewed simply as a form of criminal behavior, to be handled by means of law-enforcement and not by means of war. Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former national-security adviser, argues that, under Bush, the country's fear of terrorism has amounted to a species of "paranoia," resulting from "almost continuous national brainwashing" that has been perpetrated not only by our government but also by "security entrepreneurs, the mass media, and the entertainment industry." This in itself sounds rather paranoid.

The simple fact is that the attacks of 9/11 were the most deadly on the United States proper in its history. What is more, they followed by eleven months the suicide bombing of the *U.S.S. Cole* that killed seventeen U.S. sailors and wounded 39 others. Two years before that, two of our embassies in Africa were bombed, killing more than 300 people, and two years before that a truck bomb in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia struck U.S. military housing, killing nineteen and wounding 550.

One could go on. Perhaps more frightening is a fact I have already mentioned: tens of thousands of young men in the Islamic world have gone for formal training in terrorism. Their highest objective, presumably, is to strike at "the Great Satan" even at the cost of their own lives, or especially at the cost of their own lives. These myriads are backed by a larger network disposing of considerable resources, making use of modern technology, enjoying the support or complicity of several governments, and striving to acquire or develop ever more lethal means.

The 3,000 lives that were obliterated on 9/11 represented a new benchmark in the success of terror operations, but no one then doubted that the killers would turn at once to the challenge of outdoing this toll. So, indeed, they have repeatedly

tried to do. Contrary to Brzezinski, to be frightened by this requires no brainwashing. Nor, contrary to Soros, are those young men likely to be deterred if we issue them restraining orders.

Fukuyama offers a somewhat more judicious argument. "War" is the wrong metaphor," he writes. "Meeting the jihadist challenge is more of a 'long, twilight struggle' whose core is not a military campaign but a political struggle." The extent of that jihadist challenge, moreover, has been greatly overestimated, and its rootedness in Islam is itself exaggerated. "It is . . . a mistake," Fukuyama asserts, "to identify Islamism as an authentic and somehow inevitable expression of Muslim religiosity."

Interestingly, the very phrase "long, twilight struggle" is borrowed by Fukuyama from John F. Kennedy's characterization of the cold war—which is exactly the model that neoconservatives have repeatedly offered for the war against terrorism. And as for Islamism being an "authentic and inevitable expression of Muslim religiosity," inevitable it surely is not; but who are non-Muslims to say that it is inauthentic? It certainly seems to be authentic to the individuals who espouse it.

Nor are they alone. Despite the insistence of U.S. officials that the supporters of terrorism are a tiny minority of Muslims, the available data tell a different story. Yes, they are a minority, but not an insignificant one. This summer, the Pew Global Attitudes survey heralded a sharp decline in Muslim support for suicide bombings. After this drop, reportedly, "only" 16 percent of Turks support such attacks—as do 21 percent of Kuwaitis, 23 percent of Jordanians, 34 percent of Lebanese Muslims, 42 percent of Nigerian Muslims, and 70 percent of Palestinians. Confidence in Osama bin Laden "to do the right thing in world affairs" tracks these numbers at a slightly lower level.

There are, thank goodness, some countries where Pew's figures are lower, the lowest being Egypt, where only 8 percent approve suicide bombings. But another Pew survey conducted just a couple of months earlier found 15 percent of Egyptians believing that "attacks on civilians . . . to achieve political goals" were justified. Perhaps the discrepancy means that some Egyptians disapprove of suicide—which presents its own theological difficulties—but not the killing of innocents in a worthy cause. In the same poll, a mere 26 percent of Egyptians disapproved both of al Qaeda's attitudes toward the U.S. and of its tactics. When Egypt's Ibn Khaldun Center, run by the political sociologist Saad Edin Ibrahim, asked Egyptians whom they most admired, the three frontrunners were

the Hizballah chief Hassan Nasrallah, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Khaled Meshal of Hamas.

Troubling as they are, these data may understate the problem, at least to judge by election results in the region. In Egypt, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories, Islamist parties, some of them non-violent but some very violent indeed, have scored a string of successes. Although Fukuyama rightly assures us that "we are not currently engaged in anything that looks like a 'clash of civilizations,'" if Islamists and jihadists take over additional countries, the consequences may well resemble exactly that.

THE TERRORISTS are the shock troops of the jihadist or radical Islamist movement, a movement whose strength is limited but substantial—far greater than, for example, that of the Communists just after Lenin seized power in Russia. Jihadism has many times more supporters, its reach is more global, it has far more resources, and it has a natural constituency that Communism only pretended to have. Lenin and his band succeeded in fastening their grip on a backward country and used it as a springboard from which their heirs could contest seriously for world domination. Who is to say how powerful a threat radical Islam could become if allowed to metastasize further?

This movement has already been at war with us for some time, and has killed us by the thousands. Bush's announcement of a "war against terror" was thus nothing more than a declaration that we had decided to fight back. Soros, Brzezinski, and Fukuyama notwithstanding, this war was not "optional." If we had declined to fight it now, we would only have to fight more desperately later. If we do not fight back, can anyone imagine that the jihadists will stop? Conversely, defeat of their cause will assuredly demoralize that movement and thin its ranks.

As for the neoconservatives, they have taken their lumps over the war in Iraq. Nonetheless, the tenets of neoconservatism continue to offer the most cogent approach to the challenge that faces our country. To recapitulate those tenets one last time: (1) Our struggle is moral, against an evil enemy who revels in the destruction of innocents. Knowing this can help us assess our adversaries correctly and make appropriate strategic choices. Saying it convincingly will strengthen our side and weaken theirs. (2) The conflict is global, and outcomes in one theater will affect those in others. (3) While we should always prefer nonviolent methods, the use of force will continue to be part of the struggle. (4) The spread of democracy offers an im-

portant, peaceful way to weaken our foe and reduce the need for force.

This suggests a few priorities. First, for all our failures in Iraq, we cannot afford to accept defeat there; nor do we have to. True, our more fanciful images of what Iraq would become after Saddam's removal have gone by the boards. But there is still a world of difference between a relatively stable if troubled country and a state of anarchy.

And then there is Iran. Even if we turn a corner in Iraq, our relative success will be negated if we allow Iran to obtain a nuclear bomb. Once it does, not only will we be haunted by the specter of nuclear terrorism, but we may be constrained by nuclear blackmail from actions we would want to take in future chapters of the war against terror.

Next, only by enlarging our military can we base strategic decisions on military need and not on the availability of forces. How is it that a nation of 300 million cannot indefinitely sustain a force level of 150,000 in a given theater, meaning one soldier for every 2,000 Americans?

Finally, our efforts to foster democracy in the Middle East must not be curtailed but prosecuted vigorously and more effectively. True, the "Arab spring" of 2005 did not turn out to be as successful as the famous "Prague spring" of 1968. But then, it took two decades for that Prague spring to yield fruit. The modest liberalization in the Middle East and the democratic ferment that we have stirred there promise further advances if we persevere.

None of this offers a complete guide to waging the war against terror. But it does amount to a coherent approach, essentially similar to the one by means of which we won the cold war. By contrast, liberals and realists have no coherent approach to suggest—or at least they have not suggested one. That, after all, is why George W. Bush, searching urgently for a response to the events of September 11, stumbled into the arms of neoconservatism, unlikely though the match seemed. One can always wish that policies were executed better, but for a strategy in the war that has been imposed upon us, neoconservatism remains the only game in town.

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# Bowling with Others

*James Q. Wilson*

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IN HIS celebrated book, *Bowling Alone* (2000), the political scientist Robert D. Putnam argued that America, and perhaps the Western world as a whole, has become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, and neighbors. We once bowled in leagues; now we bowl alone. We once flocked to local chapters of the PTA, the NAACP, or the Veterans of Foreign Wars; now we stay home and watch television. As a result, we have lost our “social capital”—by which Putnam meant both the associations themselves and the trustworthiness and reciprocity they encourage. For if tools (physical capital) and training (human capital) make the modern world possible, social capital is what helps people find jobs and enables neighborhoods and other small groupings of society to solve problems, control crime, and foster a sense of community.

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam devised a scale for assessing the condition of organizational life in different American states. He looked to such measures as the density of civic groups, the frequency with which people participate in them, and the degree to which (according to opinion surveys) people trust one another. Controlling for race, income, education, and the like, he demonstrated that the higher a state’s level of social capital, the more educated and affluent are its children, the lower the murder rate, the greater the degree of public

health, and the smaller the likelihood of tax evasion. Nor is that all. High levels of social capital, Putnam showed, are associated with such civic virtues as greater tolerance toward women and minorities and stronger support for civil liberties. But all of these good things have been seriously jeopardized by the phenomenon he identified as “bowling alone.”

After finishing his book, Putnam was approached by various community foundations to measure the levels of social capital within their own cities. To that end he conducted a very large survey: roughly 30,000 Americans, living in 41 different communities ranging downward in size from Los Angeles to Yakima, Washington and even including rural areas of South Dakota. He published the results this year in a long essay in the academic journal *Scandinavian Political Studies* on the occasion of his having won Sweden’s prestigious Johan Skytte prize.

PUTNAM’S NEW essay takes an in-depth look not at social capital per se but at how “diversity”—meaning, for this purpose, racial and ethnic differences—affects our lives in society. Such diversity is increasing in this country and many others, if for no other reason than immigration, and so Putnam has tried to find out how it changes the way people feel about their neighbors, the degree of their confidence in local government, their willingness to become engaged in community-wide projects, and their general happiness.

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The ethnic and racial diversity that Putnam examines is widely assumed to be very good for us. The more time we spend with people different from us, it is said, the more we will like and trust them. Indeed, diversity is supposed to be so good for us that it has become akin to a national mandate in employment and, especially, in admissions to colleges and universities. When the Supreme Court decided the *Bakke* case in 1978, the leading opinion, signed by Justice Lewis Powell, held that although a university was not allowed to use a strict numerical standard to guarantee the admission of a fixed number of minority students, it could certainly "take race into account," on the theory that a racially diverse student body was desirable both for the school and for society at large.

As a result of this and similar court rulings, not only colleges but many other institutions began invoking the term "diversity" as a justification for programs that gave preferences to certain favored minorities (especially blacks and Hispanics). Opponents of these programs on constitutional and civil-liberties grounds were put in the difficult position of appearing to oppose a demonstrated social good. Did not everyone know that our differences make us stronger?

But do they? That is where Putnam's new essay comes in. In the long run, Putnam argues, ethnic and racial diversity in neighborhoods is indeed "an important social asset," because it encourages people to form connections that can reduce unproductive forms of ethnocentrism and increase economic growth. In his words, "successful immigrant societies create new forms of social solidarity and dampen the negative effects of diversity by constructing new, more encompassing identities."

Whatever his beliefs about the positive effects of diversity in the long run, however—not only does he consider it a potentially "important social asset," but he has written that it also confers "many advantages that have little or nothing to do with social capital"—Putnam is a scrupulous and serious scholar (as well as a friend and former colleague at Harvard). In the *short* run, he is frank to acknowledge, his data show not positive effects but rather the opposite. "The more ethnically diverse the people we live around," he writes, "the less we trust them."

Diversity, Putnam concludes on the basis of his findings, makes us "hunker down." Not only do we trust our neighbors less, we have less confidence in local government, a lowered sense of our own political efficacy, fewer close friends, and a smaller likelihood of contributing to charities, cooperating

with others, working on a community project, registering to vote—or being happy.

Of course many of these traits can reflect just the characteristics of the people Putnam happened to interview, rather than some underlying condition. Aware of the possibility, Putnam spent a great deal of time "kicking the tires" of his study by controlling statistically for age, ethnicity, education, income or lack of same, poverty, homeownership, citizenship, and many other possible influences. But the results did not change. No matter how many individual factors were analyzed, every measure of social well-being suffered in ethnically diverse neighborhoods—and improved in ethnically homogeneous ones.

"SHOCKING" is the word that one political scientist, Scott Page of the University of Michigan, invoked to describe the extent of the negative social effects revealed by Putnam's data. Whether Putnam was shocked by the results I cannot say. But they should not have been surprising; others have reported the same thing. The scholars Anil Rupasingha, Stephan J. Goetz, and David Freewater, for example, found that social capital across American counties, as measured by the number of voluntary associations for every 10,000 people, goes up with the degree of ethnic homogeneity. Conversely, as others have discovered, when ethnic groups are mixed there is weaker social trust, less car pooling, and less group cohesion. And this has held true for some time: people in Putnam's survey who were born in the 1920's display the same attitudes as those born in the 1970's.

Still, Putnam believes that in the long run ethnic heterogeneity will indeed "create new forms of social solidarity." He offers three reasons. First, the American military, once highly segregated, is today anything but that—and yet, in the Army and the Marines, social solidarity has increased right alongside greater ethnic diversity. Second, churches that were once highly segregated, especially large evangelical ones, have likewise become entirely and peaceably integrated. Third, people who once married only their ethnic kin today marry across ethnic and religious (and, to a lesser degree, racial) lines.

I can offer a fourth example: organized sports. Once, baseball and football teams were made up of only white or only black players; today they, too, are fully integrated. When Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, several teammates objected to playing with him, and many fans heckled him whenever he took the field. Within a few years, however, he and the Dodgers had won a raft

of baseball titles, and he was one of the most popular figures in the country. Today such racial and ethnic heckling has virtually disappeared.

Unfortunately, however, the pertinence of the military, religious, or athletic model to life in neighborhoods is very slight. In those three institutions, authority and discipline can break down native hostilities or force them underground. Military leaders proclaim that bigotry will not be tolerated, and they mean it; preachers invoke the word of God to drive home the lesson that prejudice is a sin; sports teams (as with the old Brooklyn Dodgers) point out that anyone who does not want to play with a black or a Jew is free to seek employment elsewhere.

But what authority or discipline can anyone bring to neighborhoods? They are places where people choose to live, out of either opportunity or necessity. Walk the heterogeneous streets of Chicago or Los Angeles and you will learn about organized gangs and other social risks. Nor are these confined to poor areas: Venice, a small neighborhood in Los Angeles where several movie stars live and many homes sell for well over \$1 million, is also a place where, in the Oakwood area, the Shoreline Crips and the V-13 gangs operate.

In many a neighborhood, ethnic differences are often seen as threats. If blacks or Hispanics, for whatever reason, are more likely to join gangs or commit crimes, then whites living in a neighborhood with many blacks or Hispanics will tend to feel uneasy. (There are, of course, exceptions: some, especially among the well-educated, prefer diversity even with all its risks.) Even where everyone is equally poor or equally threatened by crime, people exhibit less trust if their neighborhood is ethnically diverse than if it is homogeneous.

Of Putnam's three or four reasons for thinking that ethnic heterogeneity will contribute to social capital in the long run, only one is compelling: people are indeed voluntarily marrying across ethnic lines. But the paradoxical effect of this trend is not to preserve but to blunt ethnic identity, to the point where it may well reduce the perception of how diverse a neighborhood actually is. In any case, the fact remains that diversity and improved solidarity have gone hand in hand only in those institutions characterized by enforced authority and discipline.

The legal scholar Peter H. Schuck has written an important book on this issue. *In Diversity in America* (2003), he examines three major efforts by judges and government officials to require racial and income diversity in neighborhoods. One of them banned income-discrimination in the sale and rental of housing in New Jersey towns. Another enabled

blacks who were eligible for public housing to move into private rental units in the Chicago suburbs. In the third, a federal judge attempted to diversify residential patterns in the city of Yonkers, New York by ordering the construction of public housing in middle-class neighborhoods selected by him.

Although the Chicago project may have helped minorities to enter communities where they had never lived, the New Jersey and Yonkers initiatives had little effect. As Schuck writes, "Neighborhoods are complex, fragile, organic societies whose dynamics outsiders cannot readily understand, much less control." A court can and should strike down racist public policies, but when it goes beyond this and tries to mandate "diversity," it will sooner or later discover that it "cannot conscript the housing market to do its bidding."

**T**AKING A different approach, Thomas Schelling, a Nobel laureate in economics, has shown in a stimulating essay that neighborhood homogeneity and even segregation may result from small, defensible human choices that cannot themselves be called racist. In fact, such choices can lead to segregation even when the people making them expressly intend the opposite. Suppose, Schelling writes, that blacks and whites alike wish to live in a neighborhood that is (for example) half-white and half-black. If one white family should come to think that other white families prefer a community that is three-fourths white, and may move out for that reason, the first white family is itself likely to move out in search of its own half-white, half-black preference. There is no way to prevent this.

Schelling's analysis casts a shadow of doubt on Putnam's own policy suggestions for reducing the disadvantages and stimulating the benefits of ethnic heterogeneity. Those suggestions are: investing more heavily in playgrounds, schools, and athletic fields that different groups can enjoy together; extending national aid to local communities; encouraging churches to reach out to new immigrants; and expanding public support for the teaching of English.

The first recommendation is based on the implicit assumption that Schelling is wrong and on the even more dubious assumption that playgrounds, schools, and athletic fields—things Putnam did not measure in his survey—will increase the benefits of diversity even when age, income, and education do not. The second is empty: Putnam does not say what kind of aid will produce the desired effects. If he is thinking of more housing, Schuck has already shown that providing this usu-

ally does not increase diversity. If he is thinking of education, in the 1970's federal judges imposed forced busing in an effort to integrate schools; it was an intensely unpopular strategy, both among those whose children were being bused and among those whose neighborhoods were being bused into.

The third proposal, encouraging outreach by churches, might well make a difference, but how do we go about it? Require people to attend an evangelical church? Would Robert Putnam attend? I suspect not. And as for the final recommendation, teaching English at public expense to everyone, it is a very good idea—provided one could break the longstanding attachment of the education establishment to bilingual instruction.

WHETHER WE should actually seek to transform the situation described by Putnam's data is another question. I do not doubt that both diversity and social capital are important, or that many aspects of the latter have declined, though perhaps not so much as Putnam suspects. But as his findings indicate, there is no reason to suppose that the route to the latter runs through the former. In fact, strong families living in neighborhoods made up of families with shared characteristics seem much more likely to bring their members into the associational life Putnam favors. Much as we might value both heterogeneity and social capital, assum-

ing that the one will or should encourage the other may be a form of wishful thinking.

That is because morality and rights arise from different sources. As I tried to show in *The Moral Sense* (1993), morality arises from sympathy among like-minded persons: first the family, then friends and colleagues. Rights, on the other hand, grow from convictions about how we ought to manage relations with people not like us, convictions that are nourished by education, religion, and experience.

People who celebrate diversity (and its parallel, multiculturalism) are endorsing only one part of what it means to be a complete human being, neglecting morality (and its parallel, group and national pride). Just as we cannot be whole persons if we deny the fundamental rights of others, so we cannot be whole persons if we live in ways that discourage decency, cooperation, and charity.

In every society, people must arrange for trade-offs between desirable but mutually inconsistent goals. James Madison, in his famous *Federalist* Number Ten, pointed to just this sort of tradeoff when he made the case for a large national government that would ensure the preservation of those individual rights and liberties that are at risk in small communities. When it comes to the competing values of diversity and the formation of social capital, as when it comes to other arrangements in a democracy, balance is all.

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# Of Priests, Rabbis, and Wives

*Meir Soloveichik*

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*For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.*

—Matthew 19:12

*A man who lives without a wife lives without joy, without blessing, without goodness, . . . for it is written, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18).*

—Talmud Yevamot 62b

WHEN BENEDICT XVI issued his first papal encyclical on Christmas day last year, it was greeted by a fair amount of surprise. The new pope, an outspoken theologian of a pronounced conservative bent, had not chosen to write on an obviously headline-grabbing issue like the priestly ordination of women or homosexuals. Instead, he focused on an age-old question—the nature of love—which he treated in a measured, philosophical manner. But if that was one surprise, for some readers another surprise lay in what he had to say.

Like other Christian thinkers before him, Benedict took care to distinguish between love for one's own, such as the love of a man for his wife, and the unmotivated and unearned love for that which is not

one's own, for the outsider. According to the Swedish Protestant theologian Anders Nygren, whose influential book on the subject was titled *Eros and Agapé* (Swedish edition 1930-36), these two forms of love are diametrically opposed: one preferential and selfish, the other generous and open. Indeed, the two types also encapsulate a stark difference between Judaism and Christianity. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Nygren wrote, "love is exclusive and particularistic"; Christian love, by contrast, "overleaps all such limits; it is universal and all-embracing."

But here Benedict diverges, and does so specifically by citing Jewish scripture in defense of a properly directed *eros*. In Benedict's reading, the two loves do not so much contradict as complement each other. The Hebrew Bible, in firmly opposing pagan sexuality as "a warped and destructive form" of love, shows an understanding that "*eros* needs to be disciplined and purified if it is to provide not just fleeting pleasure" but a form of "true grandeur." It is this purified kind of love, Benedict adds, to which the Hebrew word *ahavah* refers.

These passages, however, are what some commentators found surprising in the Pope's encyclical. To be precise, they found surprising what they omitted. "I do not know what to make of the fact," wrote Father Richard John Neuhaus, that Benedict's "discussion of the fulfillment of the human person through being joined with a person of the opposite sex in marriage is not followed by a discussion of celibacy."

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On this point, too, there is a stark difference between Christianity and the Judaism out of which it grew. As Benedict's predecessor John Paul II noted, "the ideal of celibacy or of virginity"—of being a "eunuch for the kingdom of heaven"—was something radically new in Jesus' age, something quite unthinkable to the Jews of that time. Jesus, wrote John Paul, "spoke to men to whom the tradition of the Old Covenant had not handed down the ideal of celibacy or of virginity. Marriage was so common that only physical impotence could constitute an exception."

The contemporary Christian theologian Stanley Hauerwas agrees. For him, indeed, the issue of voluntary celibacy continues to mark one of the major moral divides between Judaism and Christianity:

Nothing distinguishes Christians and Jews more dramatically than our understanding of the family. Put simply, Christians are not bound by the law to have children. We must acknowledge that we are children by appropriately honoring our parents, but to honor our parents does not mean that we must make them grandparents. The stark fact of the matter is that Jesus was neither married nor had children. . . . What Jesus started did not continue because he had children but because his witness attracted strangers. . . . [T]he church grows through the conversion of strangers, who often turn out to be our biological children.

About this moral divide Hauerwas is correct, at least in part. Jews *have* traditionally considered themselves obligated by their religion to honor their parents by making them grandparents. Similarly, John Paul II was correct to note that, for the Hebrew Bible, "marriage, as a source of fruitfulness and of procreation in regard to descendants, was a religiously privileged state: and privileged by revelation itself."

Yet the Jewish insistence on marriage is connected to much more than generational continuity. To understand what that "more" is, it may help to look a bit more closely at Christian arguments in favor of a celibate clergy, and to ponder why Judaism has always rejected them.

WE MAY begin with "On the Catholic Priesthood," issued by Pope Pius XI in 1935. Contemplating the appointment of Moses' brother Aaron and his descendants to minister in the Tabernacle and Temple, Pius writes that, by means of this action, God "wished to impress upon the still primitive mind of the Jewish people" the idea

of "sacrifice and priesthood." But, although these antique rituals were wonderful in their own right, the Temple's "greatest majesty and glory" derived from its symbolic function: that is, it prefigured, imperfectly, the *future* "priesthood of the new and eternal Covenant [that would be] sealed with the blood of the redeemer of the world." As an example of that imperfect prefiguration, Pius cites a passage in Exodus stipulating that only during the first seven days of their service as priests were Aaron and his sons instructed "to remain with the Tabernacle, and so to keep continent"; by contrast, he concludes, "the Christian priesthood, being much superior to that of the Old Law, demanded a still greater purity."

In what way does such permanent continence reflect a "superior" degree of sanctity? For Pius, the more any man practices the moral virtue of eschewing physical pleasure, the more godlike he becomes. How much more so, then, in the case of a celibate priest, one who "dedicates and consecrates himself to God's service" and should therefore in some way "divest himself of the body."

Which brings us back to Benedict. As against Pius, the present Pope insists that we are wrong to spurn our physicality. Our bodies, Benedict argues, are an essential part of who *we* are—namely, beings made up of both body and spirit, or body and soul:

[I]t is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united does man attain his full stature.

As if with Pius in mind, Benedict goes on to observe that "Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed." They have existed, indeed, not only in religion but in the Western philosophical tradition, where they have been embraced by thinkers from Plato to Descartes. But neither is Benedict alone among Christians when he questions these tendencies, or when he echoes both Aristotle and the Hebrew Bible in insisting on "the whole man." Here again is Father Neuhaus, describing, in a particularly moving passage, how his own temporary sojourn at death's door brought home the importance of his body to his sense of self:

The notion of some of the ancients and the Enlightenment rationalists that the essential "I" is not involved in the death of this body struck me as preposterous. . . . [I]t is this body, now in pitiful ruins, that participated in the

yearnings of my loves, the bracing joy of early morning walks . . . and all those nights of languorously falling into sleep. . . . This body and I, this body that is inseparable from me, together we have been this life.

**B**UT IF OUR physicality is an essential aspect of our identity, how, then, to defend the ideal of celibacy? Though many arguments have been offered, one happens to recur time and again that is less theological than practical and ethical: the priest, as pastor, must be able to focus on his flock, and this requires that he be without the demands and the distractions of familial life and love.

The reasoning here harks back to the teachings of the apostle Paul. "He that is without a wife," wrote Paul to the Corinthians,

is solicitous for the things that belong to the Eternal, how he may please God. But he that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife: And he is divided.

The same idea runs through 20th-century encyclicals as well. "A priest," wrote Pius XI, "is to be solicitous for the eternal salvation of souls, continuing in their regard the work of the redeemer. Is it not, then, fitting that he keep himself free from the cares of a family, which would absorb a great part of his energies?" Similarly, for his successor Pius XII, "persons who desire to consecrate themselves to God's service embrace the state of virginity as a liberation, in order to be more entirely at God's disposition and devoted to the good of their neighbor." The Second Vatican Council, which began after Pius XII's reign, reiterated the point in *Perfectae Caritatis*: celibacy "frees the heart of man in a unique fashion so that it may be more inflamed with love for God and for all men."

Interestingly, a non-Catholic theologian, Johann Joseph Ignaz von Dollinger, is cited by the *Catholic Encyclopedia* as having formulated with particular vividness the point that celibacy frees the human being to devote himself body and soul to the covenanted community. By way of comparison, von Dollinger invoked specifically the plight of the Protestant pastor, burdened with wife and children:

[A] priest is a man who sacrifices himself for the sake of his parishioners. He has no children of his own, in order that all the children in the parish may be his children. His people know that his small wants are supplied, and that he can devote all his time and thought to them. They [also] know that it is quite otherwise with

the married pastors of the Protestants. The pastor's income may be enough for himself, but it is not enough for his wife and children also. In order to maintain them he must take other work, literary or scholastic, [and] only a portion of his time can be given to his people.

But this raises the question of why Protestantism rejected priestly celibacy in the first place, and on what terms. In defending the principle that pastors should be allowed to have families, the Augsburg Confession (1530), one of the earliest articulations of Protestant doctrine, drew largely on Paul's grudging concession that "it is better to marry than to burn" (and also on the argument that permitting marriage would increase the possibilities of pastoral recruitment). John Calvin, for his part, distinguished between celibacy and *chastity*; rather than insisting on the former, he thought that Christians should seek to "restore" the latter, "to bring back that obsolete discipline by which all licentiousness is restrained, and free the Church from the flagitious turpitude by which it has long been deformed."

An analogous impulse seems to have been at work in post-Reformation England, where (as the historian John Yost has written) a celibate priesthood was often discouraged on the grounds that "marriage was a necessary remedy for fornication"—the latter, of course, being regarded by Protestant reformers as a vice to which Catholic priests were especially susceptible. But Protestants could hardly deny that both Jesus and Paul had praised celibacy as an ideal for those worthy of it. John Wesley, considered the founder of Methodism and one of the fathers of modern English and American Protestantism, resolved the issue this way:

Upon the whole, without disputing whether the married or single life be the more perfect state (an idle dispute since perfection does not consist in any outward state whatever, but in an absolute devotion of all our heart and all our life to God), we may safely say, Blessed are they who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake: who abstain from things lawful in themselves, in order to be more devoted to God.

**I**N SHORT, for both Protestants and Catholics, and whether or not absolute continence is demanded of the clergy, celibacy remains a blessed spiritual state. In dismissing *eros* as un-Christian, and in promoting *agapé* as the goal to be striven for, Anders Nygren was thus drawing on a long tradition. In fact, as between Protestantism and

Catholicism, the latter, as we have seen from the example of Benedict XVI, may be the more latitudinarian, at least where lay people are concerned. And in this Benedict himself harks back not so much to Paul as to Thomas Aquinas, whom the Catholic theologian Thomas Vacek has dubbed “the apostle of *eros*.” In Vacek’s summary, Aquinas stressed that one’s ethical relationships begin with those closest to one’s self, then “lead *through* them to the dignity of all human beings, and set as a *goal* the richest possible variety of special relationships.” Only when it comes to the special case of the clergy does Catholicism appear to reject this view.

And with that we may return to Judaism, which knows nothing of a celibate clergy. To the contrary, an unmarried clergy, far from being a token of ethical superiority, represents, for rabbinic Judaism, an ethical regression: those without familial responsibilities are regarded as positively *unsuited* for religious leadership.

Stanley Hauerwas is correct that Judaism insists on the bearing of children because it is essential to Jewish continuity. But to end the matter there is to miss an essential point: if we are to learn to love others, Judaism says, we must begin by loving those who are closest to us. Sexual abstinence, Pius XII argues, “gives greater freedom to the soul which wishes to give itself over to spiritual thoughts and prayer to God.” Judaism stipulates by contrast that, far from being a distraction from pastoral duties, marriage and family form the very foundation of pastoral excellence.

According to the Mishnah, the high priest (*kohen gadol*), when representing the people of Israel on Yom Kippur and asking for atonement on their behalf, *must* be married; otherwise he is forbidden to serve in the Temple. The same has traditionally applied to Jewish communal leaders, whose authority was once embodied in the Sanhedrin or rabbinical high court; in order to serve on this body, one first had to have children. Why? So that, in the words of Maimonides (1135-1204), one would be merciful toward others.

“Do not judge another,” state the rabbinic writings, “until you reach his place.” Applied to our issue, this translates into the generalization that one who does not lie awake worrying about his own children can understand, but not fully empathize with, one who does; one who has not experienced the exclusive love that is marriage can understand, but not fully feel *with*, the pain experienced by someone who has lost a spouse. Rather than detracting from the love of others, preferential love is essential to the enterprise.

“How,” queries Pius XII, “could a missionary such as the wonderful St. Francis Xavier, a father of the poor such as the merciful St. Vincent de Paul, a zealous educator of youth like St. John Bosco, a tireless ‘mother of emigrants’ like St. Francis Xavier Cabrini, have accomplished such gigantic and painful labors, if each had to look after the corporal and spiritual needs of a wife or husband and children?” Judaism has long celebrated heroes who accomplished precisely such gigantic and painful labors. Never, however, has it suggested that they remain celibate in order to increase their effectiveness. To the contrary, the choice between exclusive and pastoral love, between special relations and love of the stranger, between spousal love and priestly *agapé*, is seen by Judaism as a false choice.

I HAVE ALREADY mentioned the Yom Kippur ritual in the ancient Temple. As delineated in the biblical book of Leviticus, Israel’s atonement was achieved, year after year, through the sacrifices brought on that day by the high priest. The several stages of the ritual, still recited as part of the Yom Kippur liturgy, illuminate the point I have been making.

The ritual centered on the sacrifice of two animals: a bull brought by the high priest on his own behalf, and the “*se’ir la-Azazel*,” commonly called the “scapegoat,” designated to bear the sins of Israel. Whenever an individual brought a sin-offering to the Temple, the Bible prescribed that he first had to confess his sins. The same applied to the high priest, who himself, as recounted in the Mishnah, went through a complex series of confessions on that day. He began by beseeching forgiveness for himself, and for his family.

And so he would say: I beg of You, O Lord, I have erred, been iniquitous, and willfully sinned before You, *I and my household*. I beg of You—by Your Name—atone now for the errors, iniquities, and willful sins by which I have erred, been iniquitous, and willfully sinned before You, *I and my household*. As it is written in the Torah of Moses, Your servant: for on this day he shall atone for you, to purify you, from all of your sins before the Lord. [emphasis added]

After praying for his wife and children, the *kohen gadol* then offered a similarly lengthy confession and prayer on behalf of his fellow priests. Only after completing these would he turn to the sins of the entire nation:

And so he would say: I beg of You, O Lord, they have erred, been iniquitous, and willfully sinned before You, Your people, *the family of Israel*. I beg of You—by Your Name—atone now for the errors, iniquities, and willful sins by which the *family of Israel* have erred, been iniquitous, and willfully sinned before You. As it is written in the Torah of Moses, Your servant: for on this day he shall atone for you, to purify you, from all of your sins before the Lord. [emphasis added]

The order is significant, embodying a millennia-old testimony to the fundamental idea that loving particular people in a preferential way is a necessary step in understanding the needs of others. In the words of Ze'ev Maghen of Bar-Ilan University:

Preferential love is the most powerful love there is, the only truly *motivating* love there is. It is by means of that love—the special love we harbor for those close to us—that we learn how to begin to love others, who are farther away. . . . It is via emotional analogy to these types of strong-bond affections that one becomes capable of executing a sort of “love leap,” a transference of the strength and immediacy of the feelings one retains for his favorite people, smack onto those who have no direct claim on such sentiments.

This “love-leap” is precisely what the *kohen gadol* performed and enacted as he moved from himself and his immediate family to his extended family, and from there to all Israel. The laws regarding the priests, moreover, continued to affect the Jewish people long after the Temple’s destruction and the abolition of sacrifices. The *Shulhan Arukh*, the authoritative 16th-century code of Jewish law, recommends that anyone leading public prayer on the High Holy Days be married—for who better can understand the condition of those in need of prayer

and forgiveness? The “fruit of virginity,” contended Pius XII, “is not only in . . . external works, . . . but also in the earnest prayer offered for others.” Judaism approaches this issue, too, very differently.

AS DAVID GELERNTER has written, many “casual observers” believe that “the underlying ethics of Judaism and Christianity are basically the same, that the differences between the two religions center on religious law and on Jesus.” This impression, Gelernter adds, is “wrong.”

Stanley Hauerwas would agree. While there are certainly traditional moral values that both Jews and Christians struggle to preserve in common, one’s theology, Hauerwas points out, often shapes one’s morality. Religious disagreements, such as those centering on Jesus and on the role of law, help to define each religion’s distinct perspective on the moral life. Responding to the claim that Jews and Christians share the same “family values,” Hauerwas quite correctly observes that, theologically speaking, “family is not central to our identity as Christians” as it is to Jews. For Christians, the biblical role model is Jesus; for Jews, it is Abraham—Abraham, who so desperately yearned for a child, who selflessly served humanity but nevertheless longed for personal progeny, and who was beloved of God for his desire to “command his children and household after him to perform justice and righteousness.”

Abraham could not be “the father of many nations” before becoming the father of one nation. Jews bear children not only because the carnal election of Abraham must continue. For Jews, raising children is essential to living a rounded ethical life. If we are truly to love *others* at all, Jews believe, we must love *some* more. Jewish universalism, to whose fruits all of human history bears witness, rests squarely on Jewish particularism, and is unthinkable without it.

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# Are We Ready for China?

*Aaron L. Friedberg*

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**T**HOUGH OUR leaders are loath to admit it, the United States is almost two decades into what is likely to prove a protracted geopolitical rivalry with the People's Republic of China. The PRC is fast acquiring military capabilities that will allow it to contest America's long-standing preponderance in the Western Pacific. In Asia and beyond, Beijing is working assiduously to enhance its own influence while at the same time seeking quietly to weaken that of the United States. Meanwhile, China continues to run huge trade surpluses with the United States, accumulating vast dollar holdings and advancing rapidly up the technological ladder into ever more sophisticated industries.

In recent years, China has managed to challenge America's preeminence in virtually every domain while at the same time drawing closer to it, establishing warm relations even with administrations that start out suspicious, if not downright hostile. How has Beijing accomplished this feat of diplomatic legerdemain? Part of the answer, of course, is that since 9/11 Washington has been preoccupied with other troubles: fighting terrorism, trying to stem the further spread of nuclear weapons, and attempting to extricate U.S. forces from Iraq. American policymakers have had their hands full in the last six years, and this has dampened whatever

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impulse they might otherwise have had to respond vigorously to China's initiatives.

But the problem runs deeper than this. Instead of attempting a premature, frontal assault on America's strategic position, Beijing has taken a low-key, indirect approach, using newly acquired instruments to chip away at its foundations. The extent of China's challenge has thus been difficult to assess and easy to ignore. This tendency toward denial has been reinforced by a set of widely held, rosy assumptions about that country's future. At least until recently, the consensus view among experts has been that China's economic growth is leading it rapidly and inexorably toward political reform. In light of this fact, the United States need only maintain cordial relations, trade and invest, and let nature take its course.

But suppose these assumptions are wrong. What if the PRC continues to grow wealthier and stronger without making the transition to liberal democracy? Could a rich, authoritarian China use its newfound power and influence to reshape the world in its own image? Two books by astute China-watching journalists help readers wrestle with these troubling possibilities.

**J**OSHUA KURLANTZICK has spent the better part of the last decade reporting on China's activities in Southeast Asia. *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*,\* his engaging

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\* Yale, 320 pp., \$26.00.

and informative new book, summarizes what he found there as well as noting some similar developments in other regions.

As his title suggests, Kurlantzick believes that China has embarked on a deliberate "charm offensive" aimed at extending its influence while reassuring others about its rise. Instead of trying to intimidate its neighbors into passivity and submission, as it did in the first half of the 90's, Beijing now hopes to woo them to its side.

This shift began during the Asian financial crisis of 1997. While Washington remained aloof, or urged painful reforms, Beijing won points by refusing to devalue its currency, thereby helping to speed a regional recovery. In the wake of the crisis, China shifted its approach to Southeast Asia and to other parts of the developing world. Where the United States was often harsh and judgmental, demanding liberalization of markets and politics, China was studiously neutral, willing to deal with anyone and eager to engage authoritarian holdouts (especially those with oil like Venezuela and Iran) that Washington sought to isolate.

As Kurlantzick describes, in recent years Beijing has deployed a new generation of sophisticated and well-trained diplomats, even to countries that the U.S. treats as backwaters. China has also sought to promote the study of its language and culture by setting up "Confucius Institutes," attracting foreign students to its universities, and building ties with ethnic Chinese business elites across Southeast Asia.

In addition to the "tools of culture," Beijing has also used the "tools of business" to win friends and influence people. Developing nations are eager to trade their minerals, food, and raw materials for China's inexpensive consumer goods. Most also welcome Chinese investment in their industries and infrastructure, and official aid that comes with no "good-governance" strings attached. Some may even look to China as an example. In the 1960's and 70's, Maoist China styled itself a leader of world revolution. At least implicitly, today's China offers a very different model, one that promises embattled autocrats that they, too, can retain their grip on power while enjoying the benefits of rapid economic growth.

**T**O WHAT extent does all of this reflect a deliberate strategy? How well is it working? And what difference does it make to the United States? Kurlantzick wrestles with all of these questions. But perhaps inevitably, given ambiguities in the evidence and uncertainties about the future, his answers are less than definitive.

China's "smile diplomacy" and its deployment of the "tools of culture" are clearly elements in a purposeful, government-directed campaign to reassure, charm, and gain influence. Whether the diverse, far-flung transactions of Chinese firms are also part of a larger plan is less apparent. As Kurlantzick notes, most of these companies are not simply tools of the regime and "may make decisions based on corporate rather than national interests." On the other hand, Kurlantzick maintains that "the government has some significant degree of oversight" over what Chinese businesses are doing, even if it is not directing their every move.

The recent explosion in overseas Chinese business activity is driven, in the first instance, by commercial considerations and, in particular, by the need for resources. Still, Beijing has clearly been quick to recognize and to seek to exploit the new opportunities for political influence presented by its growing global activity. What remains to be seen is whether China, like other great powers of the past, will adopt more interventionist foreign policies to protect and promote its increasingly sprawling commercial interests. Nineteenth-century theorists of empire believed that "trade follows the flag." Today the reverse is more likely to be true.

As to whether China's "charm offensive" has been effective, Kurlantzick reports expressions of enthusiasm for the "Chinese model" from strongmen like Ayatollah Khomeini and Raoul Castro. But these are hard to take seriously. Others may wish to mimic China's mix of economic growth and political stasis, but, at least so far, its leaders have been circumspect about urging foreigners to follow in their footsteps. They appear to realize that the preconditions for their own success (including an enormous supply of low-wage workers and vast, efficient internal-security forces) are unusual, if not unique.

Kurlantzick also cites opinion polls that show China's popularity rising in various places, even as America's has declined. But these are notoriously fickle measures of "soft power." China is enjoying a honeymoon of sorts, and its appeal is due almost entirely to its phenomenal economic performance. As Kurlantzick notes, "Any slippage would cost it dearly in soft power." Even now there are signs of a backlash in Africa, where Chinese firms, like their Western predecessors, find themselves accused of exploiting workers and stripping natural resources. As its face becomes more familiar, some of China's "charm" will begin to fade.

Still, on balance, there can be little doubt that China's growth and dynamism have made it far more attractive, and more influential, than it was

only a decade ago. Is this a good or a bad thing for America and the world? Kurlantzick says hopefully that "Beijing could wield its soft power responsibly" by resolving international disputes and embracing multilateral institutions. But he notes that China's growing influence could also be used to malign effect, shielding aspiring proliferators like Iran from American pressure,\* building a sphere of influence in Central Asia, prodding "countries like the Philippines or Thailand . . . to downgrade their close relations with the United States," and seeking at a minimum to complicate America's relations with some of its most important regional allies, including Australia and South Korea.

Unfortunately, at least for the moment, there is far more evidence of exactly these forms of assertive, competitive behavior than there are signs of growing "responsibility." As long as China is ruled by a one-party dictatorship, and threatened therefore by the mere existence of the United States and neighboring Asian democracies, we are likely to see more of the same in the years ahead.

**B**UT HOW long can the current regime last? In *The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression*,† James Mann suggests that the answer could be a depressingly long time. Mann is an experienced observer of China and of U.S.-China relations. He served for three years as Beijing bureau chief for the *Los Angeles Times* and is the author of several justly praised books on American foreign policy. To judge from his writing, Mann is no hawk or hard-liner, but his most recent work is a scathing indictment of American China-watchers, U.S. China policy, and China's one-party Communist dictatorship. Precisely because it states some uncomfortable truths, Mann's book will win him few friends, and has no doubt already made him new enemies on both sides of the Pacific.

Mann makes three central claims, each more controversial than the last. First he maintains that American analysts and policymakers have been mesmerized by what he calls the "Soothing Scenario": the belief that "China's economic development will lead inexorably to an opening of China's political system." This assumption has far-reaching implications. It has caused American observers to misinterpret developments like the organization of village elections and recent moves to strengthen the rule of law. Far from being genuine reforms, these steps are actually designed to shore up the regime. They "create the appearance of change, while leaving the fundamentals of China's political system undisturbed."

The assertion that reform is inevitable, and that it will be the direct result of economic growth, has also served to support a policy of essentially unconditional engagement with China. As Mann notes, since the end of the cold war, "virtually every change in U.S. policy toward China has been justified to the American public on the basis that it would help to open up China's political system." The belief that "everything is going to be fine in the long run" has also permitted American Presidents to "avert their gaze from the Chinese Communist party's continuing repression of all organized opposition."

In fact, as Mann correctly points out, there is no meaningful evidence of liberalization and no sign that it is just around the corner. Precisely because it has become so skillful at coopting or crushing potential opponents, the current regime could remain ensconced for some time to come. And it may have support from some surprising quarters. Contrary to what so many have predicted, China's new middle class appears to be more eager to hold onto its recent gains than to push for potentially disruptive political reforms.

In short, 25 or 30 years from now China could be much wealthier and "fully integrated into the world's economy" while at the same time remaining "entirely undemocratic." Mann is not alone in such speculations. Scholars like Minxin Pei and Edward Friedman have warned that the current regime may prove more tenacious and adaptable than many assume. Still, this scenario and its implications deserve far more attention than they have thus far received from analysts and planners, as does the possibility of regime collapse and disorder. Either one is probably more likely than the Soothing Scenario on which so many hopes now ride.

**M**ANN'S SECOND argument is that the prevailing view of China, and the policies that flow from it, are defended by what he aptly terms a "lexicon of dismissal." Those who criticize China's government for its continuing repression, or raise questions about its strategic intentions, find themselves labeled "China bashers" or "ideologues" in the grips of an obsolete "cold-war mentality." Even worse, they are accused of raising the risk of conflict by violating the prime directive of China policy. "Treat China like a threat," goes this bit of

\* Kurlantzick cites China's role in the North Korean nuclear stand-off as an example of a constructive use of its soft power. Yet, to date, Beijing seems to have been more intent on protecting an ally than forcing it to give up its nuclear weapons.

† Viking, 144 pp., \$19.95.

conventional wisdom, "and it will become one."

Mann astutely observes that American China specialists tend to see themselves as the embattled defenders of reason and prudence, struggling to hold back powerful forces—labor unions, human-rights groups, left-wing Democrats, and right-wing Republicans—that would otherwise tear the U.S.-China relationship apart. Casting their minds back to the early 1950's and the ugly era of McCarthyism, these China hands fear "the old specter, that Congress and American public opinion might become too aroused about China." They are therefore strongly motivated to squelch debate and head off possible challenges to current policy.

Yet their feelings of vulnerability comport oddly with the fact that, for over 30 years, in both Republican and Democratic administrations, advocates of engagement have held "most, if not all, of the top positions for China policy" and filled almost all of the working-level positions at the White House, State Department, CIA, and even the Pentagon. Moreover, Mann writes, "most of the China scholars at American universities and think tanks also strongly support the idea of engagement, as do the chairmen and chief executives of most Fortune 500 companies." If there is a struggle over China policy, it is clear who occupies the high ground.

All of this leads to Mann's most explosive claim: "The proclivity of American elites to refrain from public criticism of China's repressive system is reinforced all the more by the influence of money." Think tanks get hefty donations from companies doing business in China. High-ranking politicians and government officials know that if they work on China issues and "don't become identified as critics of the regime," they can move on to lucrative careers as advisers and consultants to those same corporations. Even academic China specialists can make money on the side by playing similar roles.

It is neither necessary nor entirely fair to invoke pecuniary motives to explain the views of many of the former diplomats and scholars Mann cites, including Henry Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft, Madeleine Albright, William Cohen, and former Clinton aide and University of Michigan professor Kenneth Lieberthal. Long before the China trade became so lucrative, most of these people expressed views very similar to those they hold now. And there is no reason to doubt that they are sincere in believing that the policies they prefer are best for their country and most likely to keep the peace.

Still, Mann has put his finger on a real problem. China's growth has increased the country's influ-

ence in the developing world, but it has also enhanced Beijing's ability to shape American perceptions and preferences. The hope that China will soon change, and the assurance that, in the meantime, there is a great deal of money to be made, have helped lull many in this country into a state of comfortable complacency.

**B**UT COMPLACENCY is not something we can afford. China's rising strength and increasing uncertainty about its future make it necessary for the United States to pursue a strategy that mixes engagement (and a continuing search for effective means of encouraging political reform) with intensified efforts to maintain a favorable balance of power. As a first step, Washington needs to reinforce the foundations of its regional position by continuing to tend to existing alliances and quasi-alliances. Among other things, this will mean sustaining the momentum that has been gained in recent years with Japan, India, and Australia, working to improve the strained alliance with South Korea, and, with all due delicacy, restoring trust and communication with Taiwan.

In addition to strengthening bilateral ties, Washington should also do what it can to encourage existing tendencies toward the formation of a largely informal, multilayered network of cooperative ties among various combinations of Asian states: Japan and Australia, Japan and India, India and Australia, and so on. There is no appetite now for a formal "Asian NATO," but closer links among the region's democracies are both desirable and feasible.

Nor should such linkages be limited to Asia. In recent years, European nations have increased their economic engagement in the region and, in particular, with China. As Europe's stakes grow, active efforts will be required to make sure that it is not working at cross purposes to the United States, Japan, and the other Asian democracies. The recent trans-Atlantic tussle over whether the EU should lift its post-Tiananmen arms embargo on China is an indication of possible future tensions over trade and technology-transfer issues.

Last, but by no means least, the United States will need to develop, deploy, and maintain forces that are capable of deterring and if necessary defeating China's growing "anti-access" capabilities, which are designed to push the U.S. military back from the Western Pacific. And it must do so even as it continues to wage a prolonged war against Islamist terrorism and prepares for possible nearer-term conflicts with nuclear (or near-nuclear) rogue states.

Doing all of these things, while at the same time trading and talking with China, will not be easy. The difficulties are partly conceptual: Americans are used to dividing the world neatly into friends (who have been our major trading partners, as well as our military allies) and enemies (with whom we have typically dealt very little). China does not fall cleanly into either category, and, unless it moves sharply toward democracy or open hostility, it will not do so for some time to come.

There will also be practical challenges to maintaining the right mix of engagement and balancing. The former is both pleasurable and profitable, while the latter is difficult and costly. Every one of the steps described above will evoke criticisms and warnings not only from China but from those in this country who make it their business to interpret

Beijing's anxieties and intentions. There is a real danger that, as a result of inertia, misplaced optimism, and a desire to avoid being "provocative" or creating "self-fulfilling prophecies," the United States will allow the balancing side of its mixed policy to atrophy.

If China stays on its current path, if it continues to grow richer and stronger while remaining autocratic, it will likely become bolder, more assertive, and possibly more aggressive than it is today. If the United States wishes to preserve its present military, diplomatic, and technological advantages, it will have to compete much more vigorously and deliberately than it has been doing in recent years. We are going to have to run faster just to stay in place. But we are unlikely to do so if we cannot even acknowledge to ourselves that we are in a race.

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# Rooting for the Indians—A Memoir

*Hillel Halkin*

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SHORTLY BEFORE my ninth birthday, in the spring of 1948, as the British were preparing to leave Palestine and let the Jews and Arabs fight it out between themselves, I became a Cleveland Indians fan. Although I was born and raised on the West Side of Manhattan and had never been in Cleveland in my life, this struck me as no impediment. A new enthusiast for professional sports, I wanted to be different from the Yankees, Giants, and Dodgers fans around me. When the major-league teams went south for spring training, I drew up a list of them and casually picked a favorite. The two teams whose names I liked most were the Indians and the Pittsburgh Pirates, the catchy alliteration of which appealed to me. In the end, though, I settled on the Indians, lighting a torch for Cleveland that burned bright until, sometime in adolescence, my interest in baseball flickered out almost as suddenly as it had caught fire.

Yet perhaps not so casually after all. Jerusalem lay under siege while I followed the news from a distance, its lifeline of convoys ambushed on mountain roads. Was not choosing the second exile of being a Cleveland fan in New York (I was never to encounter another) the vain attempt of a neurotic sufferer to lighten his burden by broadening

its base? And had not the Indians had their land stolen by the white man just as mine had been stolen by the Roman, the Arab, and the Englishman? Ever since I saw my first Western, roped into a boisterous children's section that cheered at every red man toppled from his horse, I had rooted for them with the instinctive sympathy of like for like.

My cousin Jonathan, who lived a few blocks away, was a Yankees fan, adding to the rivalry with which we played slug and Chinese with a spaldeen on the sidewalk. (You won't find it in any dictionary, but there wasn't a New York boy in those years who could not have told you that a spaldeen, made by the same Spalding Company that manufactured baseballs, was the pink core of a tennis ball and the regulation playing ball of the city's streets.) Scared of the Irish boys who came looking for fights from across Broadway, we mostly went in for indoor sports. In one of these contests, a heavyweight boxing match featuring my cousin, who was a half-foot taller and 40 pounds heavier, as Joe Louis, he knocked me, Jersey Joe Walcott, out for the count on my bedroom floor with a gash that required stitches.

When our bouts were stopped by the downstairs neighbors knocking on the radiator pipes, we took out the dice. Long before the advent of the binary computer we had discovered that, by combining the values of two randomly rolled cubes, each with one to six dots on its sides, and aided by a Monopoly board, we could represent practically any ath-

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letic event: track-and-field meets, tennis matches, seven-day bike races, the Kentucky Derby, nine-inning baseball games. These we broadcast live, one of us assuming the role of announcer while the other supplied the sound effects. The professional version of this old ticker-tape technique, sometimes still used in those years when New York teams played in far-off places like Chicago or St. Louis, could be heard nightly on Marty Glickman's *Today's Baseball*, which I never missed. We were in the last glory days of radio, no more aware of their rapidly approaching end than were the passengers of the great 19th-century clipper ships of the coming of the oceanic steamer.

One day the Irish boys caught us.

We were walking home on a Saturday morning from the junior service at the Anshei Chesed synagogue on West End Avenue and 100th Street when I spotted a gang of them coming toward us. Taking advantage of my size I turned to my cousin and said, "Look, I'm smaller and faster than you, so I'll run for help"—and without waiting for an answer I was weaving through the traffic and heading for the other side of West End.

Too clever for my own good! No sooner had I gained what I thought was the safe ground of the opposite sidewalk than I found myself surrounded by more young Irishmen, three or four urchins led by a freckled commander. I was trapped—and without my cousin's broad back to hide behind.

"Hey, kid! What's your name?"

"Harold," I said.

"How come you're all dressed up?"

I bit my lip.

"You Jewish, Harold?"

"No," I said. Which would have been bad enough had I not gilded the lily by adding, "I'm Catholic."

"Yeah?" A flicker of interest tinged with disappointment ran through the circle of boys. "What church d'ya go to?"

What church? There was a big one on Amsterdam Avenue and 96th Street—or was it Protestant?

"I don't go to church," I said. "I mean yet. I'm new in the neighborhood."

There was a skeptical silence. Clearly, the first thing a Catholic did in a new neighborhood was go to church. The commander asked:

"Where d'ya go to school?"

I went to a Jewish day school called Ramaz on the East Side.

"The Ramsey School," I said. "On Lexington Avenue."

"There ain't no such place," a boy said.

"There is too," said another. "It's acrost the park."

"Alright, Harold," said the commander. "Let's see what's in your pockets."

I was in luck. Because it was the Sabbath, I didn't have a wallet or any money. All I had was . . . my yarmulka. I was done for.

"Come on, turn 'em inside out."

I turned them inside out.

"That one too."

Out it came.

"What's this?" He held it up by the button, the cotton lining bellying down from the black satin top.

"It's a handkerchief," I said.

"That ain't no handkerchief," said a boy. "It's a bra for his titties."

Guffaws.

"It's a handkerchief," I insisted, fighting back the tears.

"If it's a handkerchief," the commander said, handing it back, "let's see you blow your nose in it."

I blew my nose in it.

"Harder."

I blew harder.

Solomonic, he looked around. There were no more questions. "Okay, Harold," he said, patting my head, "you can go now. Tell your momma to buy you a nice white handkerchief. And don't let us catch you again without you been to church and seen the Father."

I WAS FREE, the sickening taste of self-betrayal in my mouth. It was the bitterest moment of my life, and it would have made a Zionist of me on the spot, as the Dreyfus case had made one of Theodor Herzl, had I not already been one by parentage, education, and conviction. In Palestine it could never have happened. There I would have stood tall, even if I were hanged for it by the British like the Irgun fighter Dov Gruner.

Of course, Jews could fight back in New York, too. Hadn't I heard of a place called Borough Park, where Jewish gangs roamed the streets beating up Christians? But Borough Park was a mythical kingdom to me, its Jewish gangs as distant as the Ten Lost Tribes who lived beyond the Mountains of Darkness. It would no more have occurred to me that I could get there by subway than that I could take the IRT to the far bank of the Sambatyon River, whose deadly torrent kept the tribes from being reached.

Palestine was real. I knew the map of it better than I knew the map of Manhattan, could draw it

with my eyes shut—its gently curving coastline that fishhooked at Haifa Bay, its three lakes strung in order of size on the thread of the River Jordan, its wide-hipped Negev with its toe in the Red Sea. Among my most precious possessions was a viewer with a box of slides, given me as a birthday present, which showed me, when held to the light, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the Plain of Sharon and the Valley of Jezreel, in colors brighter than any around me.

In times of sorrow I solaced myself with these scenes like a thumb sucker, braced by the sight of orange groves and cypress trees, the Western Wall and Rachel's Tomb. Their dirt had clung to my ancestors' feet in ancient times—the same dirt I had once seen in my grandmother's apartment on the day she had beckoned me mysteriously into her bedroom, which smelled of heavy drapes and nitroglycerin pills, opened the bottom of a chest of drawers, pulled out a cloth bag no bigger than a change purse, and confided in a whispered mixture of Yiddish and English that she would be buried in its contents, leaving me too embarrassed to ask how even such a small thing as herself could fit into so little soil.

The map I could draw was that of the British Mandate, which I had the chance to study whenever my family sat down to eat, since it appeared on the blue-and-white Jewish National Fund box that stood on a sideboard in our kitchen. This box had a slot at the top big enough for a half-dollar and said "Fight for a Free Palestine" in flowing script; on Friday afternoons, before the Sabbath began, we emptied our pockets of coins and dropped them into it. It was still only half-full when the state of Israel was declared in mid-May, and the Fight for a Free Palestine went on being waged in our kitchen long after the slogan itself had fallen, like a captured flag, into enemy hands—the major Arab victory, as it turned out, of the 1948 war.

But now I became more interested in other maps: those of the fighting that appeared in the *New York Times*, showing the clashing armies as curved arrows with boxes on their tails, crescent moons in them for the Arabs, stars of David for the Jews. Haifa and Jaffa had fallen to the Jews; the Egyptian advance on Tel Aviv had been stopped; the Syrians, too, were held at Degania; but Jerusalem was still besieged, and all attempts to dislodge the Arab Legion from its blocking position at Latrun had ended in failure. I took Latrun myself one June night while lying in bed, filling my room with the *tyuuu-tyuuu* of rifle fire, the *ta-ta-ta-ta-ta* of machine guns, and the *pkkkbbkkbb* of heavy mortars before bringing in an old British

Spitfire for a strafing run to drown out the laughter from the living room where my parents were entertaining.

Things were off to a good start in the American League, too. The Indians, who had finished fourth the year before, were battling the Yankees, the Boston Red Sox, and the Philadelphia Athletics for first place. Yet in the night games I played, imitating the sound of a roaring crowd with a throaty *hrrrrhrr* and the crack of a bat with a cluck of my tongue, they were never sure winners, for while I was pitcher, batter, fielders, and ball all rolled into one, none of these was under my control any more than were the dice I threw with my cousin. As my eyes followed the loop of a fly ball to right field or the dotted line of a grounder to third, I no more knew what would happen next, whether the Indians' Allie Clark would make the catch or Ken Keltner would throw the batter out, than I had known whether Latrun would be taken until I saw its Arab defenders break and run.

Bored in school, I also played day games. Toward the end of the school year my fourth-grade teacher Mrs. Olitsky called my mother to say she feared I had a nervous disorder, since I was twitching my face, rolling my eyes, and making strange noises in class. I was hurried to the doctor, who pronounced me physically fit but recommended I see a psychologist. Luckily, it was the end of June. The psychologists were going away on vacation, and I was about to be sent off for the first time to summer camp.

IF THE MINIATURE Zion in the Poconos to which I was bused from New York resembled in some ways the enlightened dictatorship that most summer camps aspire to be, it was in other ways a full-fledged police state, its tyranny meant to ensure that campers spoke only Hebrew during their waking hours and, if possible, in their sleep. This was made clear on the first evening. Gathered at sunset around a pole with two flags, the blue-and-white one above the red-white-and-blue, we were handed our copies of a small, brown English-Hebrew dictionary, compiled under the guidance of the director. This, we were told, would suffice for our daily needs. Henceforth, at this time of day, every day, a letter Ayin, which stood for Ivrit, meaning Hebrew in Hebrew, would be awarded or denied every camper on the basis of how much of the language—or how little English, itself now a prima-facie offense—he had used in the preceding 24 hours. Campers would be graded by their scores, the ultimate prize being a sweatshirt with an

Ayin on its front, which we could now see being sported like varsity letters by the veterans of previous years. And since this incentive might prove insufficient, a penal code existed as well, whereby a camper or bunk might be docked from an activity, or assigned extra clean-up duty, should the quota of Ayins not be met.

In practice, as we were to find out, no counselor having enough ears to keep track of every word his campers uttered, the entire system depended on an army of lookouts, informers, and *agents provocateurs*. It was also not free of counselors who might be prevailed upon to award an unmerited Ayin or even a whole bunkload of them, much as a Soviet factory manager might fake production figures or fabricate a heroic worker for the sake of his career. Like any totalitarian regime, my new environment functioned by means of a fine balance of repression and deceit, each needed to keep the other in check.

I thrived in it. Not only was I a better Hebraist than most boys my age, but English, now that it was outlawed, assumed a cleansing flavor I had previously savored only in dirty words. In a society where speaking one's native language was a crime, friendship was—had to be—a gesture of unequivocal trust. How lackluster all ordinary relationships would later seem as compared with the solidarity I shared that summer with my bunkmates, whose names and faces I still remember: Freddy Ashkenazi . . . Boruch Dunn . . . Roger Fein . . . Sammy Weinstein . . . West Virginia.

West Virginia's real name I probably never knew. He was one of a small number of boys who hailed from beyond the eastern seaboard and whose names—Omaha, Alabama, Big Detroit and Little Detroit, Wyoming, Kansas City—testified to the impression made on us by their curious accents and by the fact that Jews lived in such places at all. What drew me especially to West Virginia was that he was a Cleveland fan, and a luckier one than I for he had seen the Indians play. It was he who taught me how Bob Feller went into his wind-up, kicking his left foot almost over his head; instructed me in the hook slide of Larry Doby, the first Negro player in the American League; and showed me the jack-in-the-box crouch, promptly appropriated for my own, from which Lou Boudreau, the Indians' shortstop-manager, hit.

He gave me another lesson, too. One evening we were walking through the woods, arguing whether Feller or Bob Lemon should start against the White Sox in Chicago the next day, when in the path ahead of us two fallen logs rose hastily, snatched up various articles of clothing on the

ground, and disappeared into the dusk. Counselors! West Virginia was the first to reach the scene, from which he held up an abandoned trophy, a double-coned object whose unfamiliar smell of honeyed sweat made me swoon.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A bra," he said.

The Irish bastards!

THE TWO OF us had fled into the woods to seek refuge from the Sabbath-eve dancing that was held every week at this time during the long, mosquito-ridden hour before dinner. Boys in white shirts and creased white ducks with buttoned flies, girls in blouses and skirts, we were shepherded from evening services to a field beneath the dining room where a fat Israeli dance counselor made us join hands in a circle. A limp semblance of one having been achieved, we commenced a round of galopades in which a boy or girl had to skip within the enclosure we had formed and choose from it a member of the opposite sex, whereupon the two circled together hand-in-hand until the chooser retired and the chosen chose someone else.

*Y'mina, y'mina,  
Smola, smola,*

"Rightward, rightward, leftward, leftward," the fat counselor sang as the circle revolved in one direction and its orbiting couple in the other, the boys roughly pushing each other into it to avoid being chosen themselves. Amended by them to

*Y'mean her, y'mean her,  
Smell her, smell her,*

the chant caused the girls to shrink back with the already martyred expression of their sex.

These Friday-night dances, in which we did the jigs and hops that had been popular among the *halutzim*, the pioneers in Palestine, a generation earlier, much as the quadrille and the reel continued to be danced in the colonies of the New World long after being abandoned in the mother countries of the Old, were but one of many activities designed to transmute the base alloy of exilic existence into a higher reality. The entire camp was one vast symbolic enterprise, a *minutus mundus* of arcane correspondences, starting with the director himself who, with his khaki shorts and cotton-candy puffs of graying hair on either side of a balding head, could have doubled for David Ben-Gurion were it not for the thoughtless omission of a paunch.

The wooden cabins in which we lived were not

ordinary bunks but collective settlements, kibbutzim and moshavim bearing the names of Nahalal, Beit-Alfa, Tel-Hai, and Ein-Harod. The walks we took every week around the lake, at the far end of which we stopped to eat the peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches we had prepared after breakfast to give the kitchen staff the day off, were hikes to the Sea of Galilee. The barren patch of ground behind the basketball court in which, by some reverse miracle of nature, even weeds would not grow, was not just a vegetable garden but a desert tract of the Negev magically transported to the green hills of Pennsylvania.

In response to our complaints about being brought to this vest-pocket wasteland to tend the radishes and cucumbers we had planted during the first week of camp and seen no subsequent sign of, the gardening counselor—a mournful man with a limp and a Russian accent who sometimes accompanied us on his harmonica while we scratched aimlessly at the ground—could only repeat incomprehensible phrases about the sanctity of labor and the return to the soil. Years later I came across these very words in the writings of A.D. Gordon, the great apostle of Labor Zionism. Once recovered from my impression that he had plagiarized our gardener, I was delighted to discover in them the moral of a parable over whose bare text I had sweated unfruitfully the summer I was nine.

The hieroglyphics of our existence extended to the athletic field as well, where we were encouraged to play soccer, the Jewish national sport. Yet this game proved to be based on so perverse a conception of the human body, treating the feet as though they were hands and the hands as vestigial tails, that we soon broke out our bats and gloves. Even so, however, every moment of the games we played had to be conducted in Hebrew; the only permissible exceptions were words not found in the little brown dictionary, which had a whole section of baseball terms.

IT WAS during one of these games that I struck out and was bounced by my counselor Sammy Sonnenschein, who was umpiring behind home plate. The count was two-and-two as I coiled myself into my Lou Boudreau stance and waited for the pitch. It was low and outside.

“*Kadur!*” called Sammy. Three-and-two. The next pitch was down the middle but even lower. I flung away my bat and headed for first base.

“*Hakhta’ah!*” Sammy cried. Strike three. I couldn’t believe my ears.

“Go take a flying fug!” I said—in English. My

mispronunciation was a consequence of having read Sammy’s copy of Norman Mailer’s newly published *The Naked and The Dead*, secretly taking it from the shelf above his bed and returning it with each finished installment. Unaware that its strange spelling was a concession to the censor, I had assumed it to be the correct form of a word I had been garbling all my life.

“You’re out of the game!” Sammy said. “And you’ve lost your Ayin for the day.”

I was resigned to the heave-ho; it happened in the majors for less. But the Ayin was unfair. I had spoken more Hebrew than the rest of my team combined.

“So how do you say it?” I challenged.

“Say what?”

“What I said. Show me in the dictionary.”

Sammy Sonnenschein scratched his head. The fat Israeli dance counselor was unavailable for consultation. “You little son-of-a-bitch!” he said—in English too. That evening around the flagpole I was given my Ayin, extending my hitting streak. The sweatshirt would soon be mine.

My Hebrew also entitled me sometimes to read out the daily news bulletin that was broadcast every evening after supper. After reviewing the situation in the Middle East, where an Arab-Israeli truce was precariously holding, and announcing such events of the day as the Soviet blockade of Berlin and the nomination of Henry Wallace by the Progressive party, I recited the day’s baseball scores to a tumultuous dining room. First came the National League. Then, ha-Liga ha-Amerika’it:

Ha-Yankim mi-New York 11, he-Humim mi-St. Louis 2.

Ha-Garbayim ha-Adumim mi-Boston 4, ha-Nemerim mi-Detroit 1.

Ha-Indiyanim mi-Cleveland 2, ha-Atletika’im mi-Philadelphia 0.

The White Sox and Washington Senators were rained out. It was the middle of August, and the American League was witnessing the closest pennant race in its history, with New York, Boston, Cleveland, and Philadelphia all still within a few games of each other.

Yet whatever enduring fame I acquired that summer came as an actor. Alone among the boys in my bunk, I was cast in a dramatic pageant staged by the waterfront in the last week of camp. Its subject was the Jewish state’s heroic struggle to defend itself against seven invading armies, and I had the bit part of a Hagana intelligence scout who, having penetrated enemy lines disguised as an Arab, ap-

pears out of the darkness to inform his comrades of an imminent attack. Cloaked in a white sheet, a checked towel on my head, I waited for my cue by the dim flicker of torches and shooting stars. A mournful flute played the hymn of the Palmach.

The music stopped; I was on. Gathering the folds of my sheet, I stepped onto the dock, thinking it was the wooden ramp that led to the stage, and plunged into the lake. As the Arabs were beaten back without benefit of my warning, I was fished from the water like a slice of wet bread, comforted by the stagehands that my entrance would be remembered long after all else was forgotten.

I CAME HOME from camp with my sweatshirt and a fever and was put to bed, surrounded by pillows, sucking candies, the morning's *Times*, the afternoon *Post*, and a Howard Pease sea novel brought home from the public library by my father. Mostly I listened to the radio, an old wooden table model with leather knobs and a large, fibrous speaker that was placed near me on a serving cart and tolled my day more faithfully than church bells. In the morning there was *John Gambling*, *The Breakfast Hour*, *Queen for a Day*, *Quick as a Flash*, *Strike It Rich*, and *The Sixty-Four-Dollar Question*, followed by *Luncheon at Sardi's* and my own pillow-propped lunch, after which came a baseball game: Mel Allen and the Yankees on WINS, Red Barber and the Dodgers on WHN, or Russ Hodges and the Giants on WMCA at the bottom of the listening dial. (Ah, gentlemen: where is the CD that will bring back to me your voices: yours, Russ Hodges, as crackling and warm as a log fire; yours, Red Barber, as purringly sly as a cat's; and yours, Mel Allen, Caruso of the diamond, golden tenor of my youth, whose tones had more body and flavor than the beer they promoted and a milder, smokier aroma than the cigar they deigned to praise!)

After the game, if I hadn't dozed off during the seventh-inning stretch, came the last of the afternoon soap operas, *Lorenzo Jones* or *Mary Noble*, followed by the early-evening thrillers: *The Green Hornet*, *Captain Midnight*, *Sky King*, *Jack Armstrong*, *Sergeant Preston of the Royal Mounted Police*. Dinner was brought on a tray while I listened to the news commentaries delivered with the evangelical gloom of Gabriel Heater or the patrician smugness of Fulton Lewis, Jr. At seven there was *Today's Baseball*, followed from out of the thrilling days of yesteryear by *The Lone Ranger* and afterward, if I was lucky, a night game.

Then, however, the lights were turned out and

the radio was returned to its place in the corner. I had to get out of bed and tiptoe across the room, where I crouched with my ear to the speaker in the orange glow of the tubes at the back of the set, ready to shut it off and dive back into bed like a runner beating a pick-off throw if I heard my parents' footsteps in the hallway. How then did I allow myself to be caught off-base by my mother, who came to check that I hadn't thrown off my blankets in my sleep and found me standing in my bare feet, my cough not yet gone, the telltale tubes still fading in the dark?

It was because the Indians, neck-and-neck in the homestretch with the Yankees and Red Sox, were playing New York in Cleveland; because, down 6-4 in the bottom of the ninth, they had loaded the bases with one out; and because . . . but I would have to wait, unable to fall asleep, for the morning paper to learn the outcome. Cleveland had scored one more run before switch-hitting Dale Mitchell, batting right-handed against lefty reliever Joe Page, grounded to Rizzuto at short to end the game. The Indians had slipped to third place.

AFTER THAT summer, I didn't go back to the junior service. I had outgrown it—more so, at any rate, than I had outgrown my fears of the Irish. From now on I joined my father on Saturday mornings on his mile-long walk to the synagogue of the Jewish Theological Seminary, on Broadway and 122nd Street, where he taught.

We were accompanied by his friend and colleague, the Bible scholar H.L. Ginsberg, who lived nearby. While the two of them argued about Ginsberg's latest proposals for emending verses in the Bible, which he regarded as an inexhaustible compilation of scribal errors, I concentrated on the cracks between the paving squares on the sidewalk, either avoiding or stepping on each of them, or quizzed myself on the cars parked along Broadway. Although you could walk the entire distance without identifying a foreign make, there were, beside those of the Big Three manufacturers, numerous automobiles as extinct today as the woolly mammoth: Packards, Hudsons, Nashes, Kaiser-Fraseres, Crosleys, and Studebakers, the last with its 1948 model whose back looked so like its front that drivers were said to have climbed into the rear seat before noticing the absence of a steering wheel.

Ginsberg was a nervous man with a rapid-fire stutter that disappeared when he sang, which may have been why, despite a shrill, reedy voice, he was compassionately tolerated on the High Holy Days as the synagogue's cantor for the Shaharit, the

opening part of the liturgy. In the second row in which he and my father sat along with other senior faculty members like the homiletics teacher Max Arzt, the medieval Hebrew literature professor Shalom Spiegel, the rabbinics scholar Max Kadushin, and the theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel, he was known as "Blitz" because of the speed with which he led the prayers.

These were my father's social cronies. The third row was occupied by junior faculty, while the first was mostly empty, its long pew reserved for four eminences: the Seminary's chancellor Louis Finkelstein, the renowned Judaica scholar Louis Ginzberg, the great talmudist Saul Lieberman, and the legendary librarian and bibliographer Alexander Marx. A tall man with twinkling eyes and a goatish beard on which he chewed, Marx sat in front of me and sometimes spun around to grab my ear. He had served, I was told, in the German cavalry in World War I, which heightened his stature in my eyes.

Lieberman, who sat next to him, was my uncle, the husband of my mother's elder sister. A Lithuanian Jew with a no-nonsense attitude toward religion, he once, when I was a college student, was to startle me by saying that he considered prayer a waste of time, since it interrupted his study of Talmud and he had nothing to say to God. I did not contradict him by remarking that, standing diagonally behind him as a boy on Yom Kippur, the only day of the year on which he covered his head with his prayer shawl, I had glimpsed beneath it the tears running down his cheeks.

Had he believed on that occasion that his fate for the coming year was about to be sealed in the great Book of Life? Until recently I had conceived of this volume as a heavy ledger with lines ruled in gold. Now, old enough to understand that it was a metaphor, an all-knowing God having no need to keep records like a school principal, I asked myself how, if God knew in advance what would happen to me, I could have any choice but to do what He knew I would. Why reward my good deeds or punish my bad ones if I only performed them because I had to?

I did not know that, from Augustine to Spinoza, there wasn't a philosopher who had not wrestled with this problem—that in fact there wasn't a major philosophical question that most children had not asked themselves by the age of ten, after which it was a matter of either refining or forgetting it. The best I could do was hypothesize that, if my actions originated as thoughts in God's mind, He had left me a thin margin of freedom, just as the players in the baseball games that took place in my head retained the ability to surprise me.

THE INDIANS had bounced back from their loss to the Yankees and were now going into the last game of the season, on October 3, a game ahead of the Red Sox. They had only to beat fifth-place Detroit to win the title and open the World Series on the 6th against the Boston Braves. This was perfect timing. The Jewish New Year fell on the 4th and 5th, and I would not have to miss an inning.

But it was not to be. Cleveland lost, shut out by Hal Newhouser, while the Red Sox beat the Yankees. The season had ended in an unprecedented dead heat. A one-game playoff would be held in Boston the next day.

At dinner that night, my father recited the blessings over the wine and hallah, which we ate dipped in honey to make the new year sweet. A guest from Israel had brought a pomegranate, a first fruit from the Jewish state, in a diplomatic pouch, and my father's voice shook as he held it and said, "Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hath given us life and sustained us and brought us to this day." Our guest showed me how to eat it, scooping out the blood-red seeds.

"I remember one Rosh Hashanah," he reminisced, "when I was a *balutz* in a work gang on the Afula-Tiberias road. We didn't work that day, but we didn't pray, either. Although we all came from religious homes, work had become the only prayer we knew. We were sitting outside our tent, not knowing what to do with ourselves, when I picked up my violin and started to play. First I played all the sad tunes I could think of, and then I played the quiet ones, and then I played the happy ones. Before I knew it we were all dancing on the Afula-Tiberias road."

The service in the Seminary's synagogue the next morning was a lengthy one. I kept looking at my watch. Apart from the prayers, there was the blowing of the shofar to draw things out. The shofar blower had a bad day, producing an arpeggio of false starts and muffled squeaks for every true note that he sounded, wiping his mouth with his jacket sleeve and peering down the opening of his horn as though he expected to find a dead mouse. As soon as the prayers ended, I asked my father for the key to our apartment and raced home ahead of him.

I ran the whole mile, reaching home in the bottom of the second inning with the score tied 1-1, in plenty of time for Ken Keltner's three-run homer in the top of the fourth. After that, it was the Indians all the way. Boudreau homered twice, the knuckleballing Gene Bearden kept Boston at bay, and Cleveland took the game and the pennant. As Keltner charged Birdie Tebbets's grounder in the ninth

and fired it to Eddie Robinson for the last out, I pounded triumphant fist into palm to make the sound of ball meeting glove. Then I ran to the window of my room and flung it open. In the waning autumn light I watched the dusk-crazed pigeons circle and wheel over the buildings between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive, the chrome-colored sunset glancing off their pale wings.

Given that it took the Indians six more years to win their next pennant, during which they broke my heart every summer, you could call it beginner's luck.

THE NEW YEAR started off with Cleveland winning the World Series four games to two, the last of them on the day before Yom Kippur.

Though not yet required to by Jewish law, I decided to fast. Now that I was attending an adult synagogue, I would do as the adults did.

I was to regret it. Hunger came and went in sharp spasms, leaving me now grim and resolute, now drained and past caring. Each time the congregation recited the *Al Het*, the public confession of sins arranged in alphabetical order by some liturgical bureaucrat, I beat my breast until it hurt. The roster was endless, interminable; to each sin, whether guilty or not, I had to confess with the other defendants as though in a purge trial. And as if hunger were not torture enough, I was made to rise to my feet each time the ark was opened and stand there on stiff, weary legs as if I were in a courtroom whose judge kept absent-mindedly coming and going.

Although the Shaharit was tossed off at his usual pace by H.L. Ginsberg, even he could not make it any shorter. Then my father, the Seminary's regular Torah reader, chanted the day's portion about the scapegoat sent to die in the wilderness; in the notes of his delivery, famed for its exactitude, there was a great sadness. H.L. was relieved and a new cantor took his place for the Musaf, the next round in the day-long devotions; fresh from the bullpen, he lingered over each page of the prayer book as if in hopes of wearing God out. The airless synagogue had a smell like that of rotting leaves, the debris, so I thought, of fallen prayers.

Minhah, the afternoon service, was recited and with it the story of Jonah, who bolted in a panic from God to end up in the belly of a fish. Then the entire congregation rose to its feet once more for Ne'ilah, the closing service of the day. One last time the list of sins was recited, sin by alphabetical sin. Now I took no part but listened numbly, overwhelmed by my physical ordeal and the magnitude of my iniquity, my sole concern being to stave off the impending levitation of my body. The prayers unfolded in turn: the *shmoneh esreh* was behind us; *avinu malkenu*; *aleinu*; the final *kaddish*; and the congregation repeated seven times "the Lord is God," each repetition more ragged than the one before, like breakers collapsing on the shore.

Then the shofar was blown—this time loud and clear—and everyone exclaimed hoarsely, "Next year in Jerusalem!" while hurriedly putting away his prayer shawl. It was—I knew it, half-dead though I was—the most sensible wish of the day.

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## OBSERVATIONS

# In the Tents of Kabul

*Rosanne Klass*

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WHEN I first went to Afghanistan in the 1950's, I knew nothing about the place, and certainly had no idea that I was beginning a lifelong involvement. If I could find it on the map, that was only because some graduate students I knew at the University of Wisconsin had taken jobs teaching English in Kabul; they would write back about their trips to visit the Taj Mahal in India or to vacation in Ceylon and other similarly exotic adventures.

My own eyes were fixed on Paris. Like most aspiring literary types in the decades after World War II, my boyfriend and I felt it necessary to spend a significant amount of time on the Left Bank. The problem was money. In those days there were no semesters abroad or student tours, no jets or charter flights. I had man-

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aged to get myself from the Middle West to the water's edge—New York City—but a starting job at \$35 a week could take me no farther than that. Then our friends in Kabul wrote that the Royal Afghan Ministry of Education was hiring more teachers, and suggested that we join them. The living there was cheap—and, most importantly, the Afghan government would pay for our transportation. We could stop in Paris going or coming, or both. So off we went to the Afghan embassy to sign up for an American-run school in Kabul. Then we got married, and sailed.

A few weeks later, with a stopover in Western Europe behind us, I found myself uneasily en route to Central Asia and a country about which I still knew almost nothing—not even what language was spoken there. The New York public library had turned up only a Lowell Thomas travelogue, a memoir by an engineer who had worked in Afghanistan in 1913, and a few articles in *National Geographic*—the usual camels and veils beyond the Khyber Pass. I was vaguely aware that Afghanistan was a Muslim country, but had no idea what that

might mean for an American woman—or that I was about to find myself in a totally masculine society, where local women were secluded by the rules of *pardah*, concealed in their homes by high adobe walls, and shrouded from head to foot when they ventured out.

To be sure, this was nothing like the violent craziness that would characterize rule by the Taliban decades later; it was more a matter of rooted tradition rather than of fanaticism, and there were already many Afghans who wished to see *pardah* abandoned. But in 1929 a premature effort to outlaw it by royal fiat had led to upheaval and the abdication of the reformer king, and nobody was prepared to take that risk again. Although foreign women like me were exempt from *pardah*, that only made for further awkwardness, since ordinary Afghans were not quite sure how to behave in our presence.

Kabul was very different then, a city of a few hundred thousand. Only government offices and the post office had telephones. Electricity was weak and erratic. There was not a mile of paved road in the entire country. Buses and trucks,

donkeys and bicycles streamed through the bustling bazaars, but there were relatively few private cars; you walked, or rode in rickety one-horse buggies. When night came, the unlit streets fell silent; one could hear a dog bark on the other side of the mountain ridge that split the city. The night sky seemed like obsidian, hard and remote and dusted with multitudes of stars.

WE CERTAINLY had no thought of finding a Jewish community there; it never occurred to us that there might be one. But soon after our arrival in Kabul, it was our good fortune to meet a leader of that community, a businessman of substance and dignity named Shaban Ibrahim, who was to become our friend and mentor.

Shaban was a prosperous importer of commodities like cotton, a broker and financier, known and respected from Beirut to Japan (as I was to discover many years later when his name opened doors for me in both places). Not long before, he had sent his wife and three children, all of whom he adored, to Israel. He intended to join them soon, and then to move on with them to New York. For this he would need to learn English. And so we met.

My husband and I were a couple of naive kids, just out of college, but for Shaban we were knowledgeable Americans who could introduce him to the world he planned to enter—and we were Jewish, so we had to be well taken care of. Kind, and painfully lonely, he took us under his wing and made us his surrogate family, shepherding us through our years in Kabul. And through him, we caught a glimpse of a world that was even then vanishing forever.

Today, the Jewish community of Afghanistan has entirely disappeared, reduced at the end to two crotchety old men squabbling over who owned a single remaining Torah scroll that had apparently been confiscated by the Taliban; at last report, only one of them sur-

vives, living in the shell of an old synagogue. But as recently as the 1940's, Afghan Jews numbered in the thousands, most of them in Kabul and Herat, the ancient city on the Iranian border to which many Persian Jews had fled to escape forcible conversion in the 19th century. Four synagogue buildings have been identified in Herat alone.

There had been Jews in Afghanistan for at least the thousand years of its Islamic history and perhaps long before that. Everything in that land stretches one hand into the present while the other reaches backward into an infinite past. Certainly the communities of Herat and Kabul were ancient, and most Afghan Jews were native-born; in some cases, so were their forefathers, as far back as they knew. Others had arrived at various times from Persia, Central Asia, India, or Russia to flee persecutions or to take advantage of the opportunities offered in this historic crossroads of trade. At times the Muslim world had been more hospitable to them than Europe; many Afghans, in particular, were adherents of a relatively tolerant school of Sufism.

Several years after I left Afghanistan, the towering minaret of Jam in the remote central mountain massif was rediscovered—the last surviving remnant of the capital city of the 12th-century Ghorid empire. A Jewish cemetery was also found nearby; when I returned to Kabul in the 1960's, I saw Hebrew-inscribed tombstones from Jam in a corner of the Kabul Museum. Despite the Mongol invasions in the 13th century that destroyed much of the earlier historical record, there are indications in medieval Jewish texts that Jews may have settled in this area much earlier, in the Buddhist and Zoroastrian eras, long before Islam arrived in the 9th century. Some think their presence might even go back as far as the era of the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century B.C.E.

UNDER THE Muslims, Jews had to put up with restrictions that affected other non-Muslims as well (like the small Sikh and Hindu communities), and at times were subjected to special pressures and discrimination. But they were citizens, and in the mid-20th century many had prospered, their position undisturbed by the war between the newborn state of Israel and its Arab neighbors. Afghanistan murmured the requisite formalities of sympathy with its Muslim brethren, but then went its own way. In fact, Afghans generally do not like Arabs, and Afghan officials spoke to me hopefully of opening diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv.

For Afghan Jews, however, the creation of Israel was an ancient dream come true; the promise so often recited in their prayers had been kept, and many now left to find their place in the promised land. By the time I first arrived, Kabul's dwindling community seemed to be without a rabbi, though the remaining families actively strove to maintain a Jewish life in their homes.

At the time, the community in Kabul still numbered at least a few hundred. Many were so-called "Bukharan"—i.e., Central Asian—Jews, who a generation or two earlier had fled Soviet rule in Bukhara, Khiva, Samarkand, and other centers where they were no longer welcome either as Jews or as merchants and traders. In Kabul, most of them became involved in international trade and import-export. Officially, such businesses were restricted to Muslims, so Muslim partners served as front men; everyone knew, and everyone understood. Business was conducted largely in Persian (written in Hebrew script) through a worldwide network of agents to whom the Kabul traders were linked by long-standing marriage and family connections.

These Afghan Jews had their own customs, unfamiliar to me and sometimes unique. The Passover seder table, for example, included a

mysterious tray of green onions, and midway through the seder everyone seized a few and started beating their neighbors about the ears with them, laughing heartily. I have never been able to find out why.

The Herati, a minority in Kabul, claimed slightly superior cultural and social status. Therefore, even as the overall community had begun to shrink, the two groups maintained separate synagogues. As for Western Jews, who were or should have been at the top socially, their numbers had been reduced to a physician, a refugee from Hitler's Germany who left after World War II ended, and, earlier, the great archeologist Sir Aurel Stein. And now there were the two of us. As American Jews, we were on a pedestal—perhaps I should say a two-tiered pedestal, for as an American Jewish woman I truly was treated like a princess.

DURING OUR first few months in Kabul, confusions and snafus at the ministry of education left me without my expected position. My husband was teaching at the university, but for me there was nothing to do but stay at home in our high-walled compound. As an unveiled woman who spoke not a word of Farsi, it was difficult to go out and explore the city. With every passing day I fretted more about my sense of uselessness. Thus, when the opportunity arose, I was glad for a chance to do some private tutoring.

We first learned about the Jewish community through Mayer Abraham, an energetic young businessman who had handled some matter for our friends and used to stop by occasionally to polish up his conversational English. Mayer was planning to emigrate to the United States, but was living meanwhile with two uncles who had similar plans. One of them was Shaban Ibrahim. All three having sent their families ahead to Israel, they had taken up bachelor quarters together. One day Mayer said that his uncle Shaban knew only a little English

and wished to inquire if I would give him lessons. I immediately agreed, and invited them to tea the next day.

They arrived promptly at the appointed time—rather unusual for Kabul, where an hour's tardiness was not considered discourteous. Shaban Ibrahim was completely unlike his ebullient nephew: a dignified man in his late forties, unobtrusively well-tailored, soft-spoken, almost courtly, and very reserved. Despite his nephew's earlier equivocations, he really knew no English at all beyond a few words of greeting.

He had the look of solid estimable substance and judicious self-esteem that you see gazing out steadfastly from 18th-century portraits of worthy New England merchants. Indeed, for many years he had been the doyen of the Jewish community in Kabul, respected both in his own community and in the wider circles of business and government in which he moved. It was clear from his manner that he was usually self-assured; now, a palpable sense of unease at being walled off by language seemed to have taken him by surprise and disturbed his equilibrium as if by a sudden attack of vertigo.

Shaban, his nephew explained, was hoping to leave within a few months, as soon as he could wind up his business affairs, so he needed to learn English quickly. I promised to do my best, and produced a textbook. Shaban seemed pleased with the proposed arrangements, and in turn invited us to come to Shabbat dinner at his home on the following Friday evening.

WHEN THEIR servant ushered us into the ill-lit, cavernous living room in the silent house shared by the three men, we found them sitting stiffly in a row on an ugly, uncomfortable-looking sofa, as though they had been waiting there for hours. At once all three stood up, bowed, shook hands, murmured greetings, and sat down again. They offered cigarettes, a drink. Then the

conversation collapsed, exhausted, while everyone tried to think of some way to revive it.

The sparsely-furnished room baldly displayed their enforced bachelorhood. These were prosperous men, and not unworldly, yet not a single object suggested comfort—nothing beyond the irreducible necessities of graceless sofas and bare, marble-topped tables. Even the flowers stuck into vases in honor of the occasion seemed as stiff and uncomfortable as stalagmites. With their families gone, they had pooled their loneliness without diminishing it. I had a vision of them huddling together for comfort on a cold night, like the Gish sisters in peril.

They seemed almost surprised to have a woman at their table again, and all but drowned me in solicitude. The dinner was very good; the conversation a strain. Since Shaban refused to attempt English, and his painfully shy brother seemed to know as little as he, their nephew was kept hectically busy trying to sustain a social exchange involving a great many repetitions of "What? What did he say?" and long explanations of every explanation. As we sat over coffee, the three men consulted briefly in Persian and Mayer turned to us again to explain.

"It is Sukkot, you know," he said, the harvest festival that follows close upon the High Holy Days. I did not know. Kabul operated on three calendars—the international Gregorian calendar, the traditional daily Afghan calendar, and the lunar Muslim religious calendar—and I could hardly keep track of any of them, let alone the Jewish one. So I just nodded politely. "There is a family across the street—they have built a sukkah in their garden," Mayer continued. "Would you like to go there to see it? They have invited."

I had not seen a sukkah in years. When I was small girl growing up in Iowa, I always found them very pretty, and I well remembered the flimsy trellised booths in the back

yard of our Reform synagogue, trimmed with leaves and pieces of fruit: symbols of the huts dotting the harvest fields of Judea so many eons ago. It would be pleasant to go—and ungracious to refuse. Besides, our conversation seemed to have reached its outermost limit.

So out we all went into the shadowy street, chilly in the autumnal air, the men leading the way to a gate some yards distant. At their knock, we were let into a dark courtyard and through a house, its rooms well lighted but vacant. Then we stepped through another outer door and I stood still, astonished.

I was in a large pavilion, perhaps twenty or more feet square, that filled a courtyard. Its high framework was of straight peeled saplings set into the earth. Overhead, fresh green boughs were thickly interwoven to make a fragrant roof. The walls were deep-red carpets, hung like tapestries from the outer roof poles; they glowed in the warm yellow light of oil lamps. More carpets covered the hard-packed earth. Around the sides of the room, bright cushions and smaller rugs were profusely heaped. Great brass trays were set out before them, filled with steaming pilaus, fresh fruits, pomegranates, dates, pistachios, almonds.

FAMILY AND friends, aunts and uncles, grandparents, young children—all were sitting about on the cushions, eating, talking, laughing. As we entered they looked up and

paused, and in that moment, before they rose to greet us, two thousand years slipped away.

At the end of the room, amid the cushions, a young woman knelt beside a child, her face turned to us. And that face was the face of Rebecca at the well, it was Rachel, it was Sarah, it was Ruth gleaning the fields beneath the eyes of Boaz. For that face Jacob had labored seven years, and yet another seven, in the service of Laban. Solomon had sung of that face; Eugène Delacroix had painted it; William Blake saw it in his *Visions*. Until then I had thought that they were dreaming.

She was perhaps less than twenty years old, but queenly and tall, “like the cedars of Lebanon.” The biblical words seem to shape themselves. Her face was oval; her skin, smooth and faintly olive; her nose was high, arched, and aquiline; and her eyes—enormous, shining, incredibly dark and liquid, utterly serene. I had never seen such eyes and have never seen them since except in a book of the reliefs from the palace of Ashurnasirpal—and those were not gentle, like hers.

Her black hair lay smooth and glossy, drawn back under a flowing head scarf. When she rose, I saw that she was seven or eight months pregnant. But as she moved across the pavilion to welcome us, she held herself with such grace that her heavy body, in flowing robes, seemed to enhance the beauty of her movements.

She was the mistress of this

house. Around her were gathered her younger sisters, the smallest perhaps seven or eight years old; each of them turned to us the same countenance. Her parents were there, too, and other relatives, but in none of their faces was there a sign of that proud unaware beauty. Her husband glanced at us from time to time to see if we had recognized her splendor, and threw admiring looks at her of which she was apparently oblivious.

We were warmly welcomed; our plates were heaped with fruit. The company took up the thread of the evening again, singing and talking. Incongruously, one of the men brought out a short-wave radio and everyone was hushed as he tuned in to a program of music from Israel. As the children grew sleepy, they curled up quietly on their cushions, for the family ate and slept in this sukkah throughout the week-long festival. A breath of wind occasionally stirred the leaves overhead and swayed the hanging carpets. The sweet scent of ripe fruit and contentment overhung the warmth of the room. The young wife moved about, attending to the wants of her guests: a presence, an aura of a dream.

Outside again, in the frost-touched midnight, the desert stars glittered faintly, far away, and the chalky light of the pale full moon froze the silent streets and the high walls into a vista of ancient memory. And I thought: I have seen Ur of the Chaldees, I have sat in the tents of Abraham.

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## MUSIC

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# Beyond the Musical Avant-Garde

*Terry Teachout*

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WHAT REALLY happened to classical music in the 20th century? The survey histories of modern music that were published in the 1960's mostly took for granted the historical inevitability and ultimate triumph of atonality and the postwar avant-garde. But history, as it is wont to do, went in a different direction.

By century's end, it was clear that there had been nothing inevitable about those two stylistic developments, neither of which was embraced by audiences or performers. Today they are, if not exactly forgotten, then ignored by a new generation of classical composers who have other priorities. The American minimalist composer Philip Glass spoke for many in dismissing the European avant-garde as "a wasteland, dominated by these maniacs, these creeps, who were trying to make everyone write this crazy creepy music."

Historians, not surprisingly, are still sorting out the collapse of the

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avant-garde, and so most of the new "narratives" of musical modernism have been less descriptive of what was than prescriptive statements defending what the critic happens to consider desirable. If, as has been said, history is written by the victors, then critics are seeking to rewrite the history of 20th-century classical music so as to make it accord with their particular beliefs about the relative significance of its major figures.

Alex Ross, the music critic of the *New Yorker*, has approached the task in a different way in his new book, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the 20th Century*.<sup>\*</sup> As he writes in the preface:

Histories of music since 1900 often take the form of a teleological tale, a goal-obsessed narrative full of great leaps forward and heroic battles with the philistine bourgeoisie. When the concept of progress assumes exaggerated importance, many works are struck from the historical record on the grounds that they have nothing new to say. These pieces often happen to be those that have found a broader public. . . . Two distinct repertoires have formed, one intellectual and one popular. Here [in this book] they are merged: no language is con-

sidered more intrinsically modern than any other.

The result is a volume sharply different in tone from its predecessors—and truer, in my view, to the history of musical modernism.

IT IS NOT that Ross is "non-judgmental," as the current shibboleth would have it. In *The Rest Is Noise*, he leaves no doubt of his personal priorities. He devotes much space, for example, to composers like Aaron Copland and Jean Sibelius who were long undervalued by critics and historians because their music failed to accord with prevailing notions of the "progressive."

On the other hand, Ross's taste is both wide-ranging and receptive, and he never makes the inverse error of assuming that a piece of music is bad merely because it does not sound like Copland or Sibelius, or because it is inconsistent with some other theory of modernism. Insofar as it is possible to do so, he takes music as it comes, and is open to the possibility that any kind—even the atonal kind—can be good.

Needless to say, criticism is judg-

<sup>\*</sup> Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 624 pp., \$30.00.

ment first and foremost, and part of what makes *The Rest Is Noise* compelling is the fact that so many of its critical judgments are convincing. Time and again Ross puts his finger unerringly on the pulse of a composer or a specific work, summing it up with the pithy brevity of a first-class journalist.\*

No less striking is his willingness to engage with musical modernism as a part of the larger world of both culture and politics. Accordingly, his frame of reference is unusually wide—and, for the most part, unusually clear-eyed.

The key figure of *The Rest Is Noise*, for instance, is not a real person but a fictional character. Adrian Leverkühn, the tortured anti-hero of Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947), is for Ross the most telling symbol of what, under the pressure of totalitarian politics, had happened to classical music at mid-century. As he reminds us, Leverkühn is "a modern composer [who] produces esoteric masterpieces and then descends into syphilitic insanity," and his terrible fate is offered by Mann as a symbolic account of the rise and fall of German art and culture.

In Ross's words:

Leverkühn is an intellectual monster—cold, loveless, arrogant, mocking. His music absorbs all styles of the past and shatters them into fragments. . . . Since *Faustus* is also a book about the roots of Nazism, Leverkühn's "bloodless intellectuality" becomes, in a cryptic way, the mirror image of Hitler's "bloody barbarism." The cultish fanaticism of modern art turns out to be not unrelated to the politics of fascism: both attempt to remake the world in utopian forms.

This anti-utopian declaration suggests the extent to which Ross has freed himself from the constricting and politically-tinged idea of aesthetic progress. To be sure, he himself is not a conservative, and in fact his description of the anti-Communist movement in postwar

America is marred by an uncritical acceptance of the clichés of the political Left. It is far too simple-minded—too cute, really—to insinuate as Ross does that the hermetic musical modernism of the 50's and 60's in America was in some fundamental sense the emanation of an anti-Communist impulse: "Milton Babbitt, the emblematic cold-war composer, produced [serial] music so byzantine in construction that one practically needed a security clearance to understand it."

At the same time, though, Ross is forthright about the horrors of life under Communism—so much so that he even criticizes Copland for having played "naïve ideological games" in his music with the American Communist party. His final verdict on the 30's is likewise unsparing. "The period from the mid-30's onward," he writes,

marked the onset of the most warped and tragic phase in 20th-century music: the total politicizing of the art by totalitarian means. . . . Not only did composers fail to rise up en masse against totalitarianism, but many actively welcomed it.†

ONE SHOULD not expect too much from a historian, and so I am not troubled by the fact that Ross's tastes in contemporary classical music—he writes with special enthusiasm about the work of John Adams and Thomas Adès—do not closely resemble my own.

Far more important, in my view, is his overall recognition of the need for contemporary composers to forge stylistic languages (if not a language) that will be accessible to the common listener. This theme, which permeates the pages of *The Rest Is Noise*, is first sounded in Ross's discussion of the emergence just prior to World War I of the "New Viennese School" of hermetic modernists led by Arnold Schoenberg: "Fin-de-siècle Vienna offers the depressing spectacle of artists and audiences washing their

hands of each other, giving up on the dream of common ground."

Not so Ross, who is in the best sense of the phrase a cultural democrat. "Mainstream audiences may lag behind the intellectual classes in appreciating the more adventurous composers," he writes apropos of Sibelius, "but sometimes they are quicker to perceive the value of music that the politicians of style fail to comprehend."

Yet he recognizes no less clearly that the continuing health of the culture of classical music depends on its ability to incorporate and popularize new ideas. In America between the wars, Ross rightly observes,

the failure to support the new led inexorably to the decline of classical music as a popular pastime, for nothing bound it to contemporary life. A venerable art form was set to become one more passing fad in a ravenous consumer culture.

Ross's grasp of the similar problem facing today's classical composers is a large part of what makes *The Rest Is Noise* so valuable. When he remarks approvingly that Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* "took back the cultural middle ground that [George] Gershwin had colonized in the 20's and 30's," he makes clear his own belief that there is still a place for classical music in our popular culture. Thus, it is no accident that he has singled out for

\* I especially like his description of the opening of Copland's *Billy the Kid*: "Woodwind figures in rough-hewn parallel fifths cut across an emptied-out musical space, conjuring the picture of a wagon train moving across some long, dusty valley of the West. Yet the music comes straight out of the Parisian Stravinsky. The keening lines for high clarinets and low oboes echo the 'Spring Rounds' section of the *Rite of Spring*, as do the folkish grace notes that are added later."

† Notable in this connection is Anton Webern's hysterical paean to Adolf Hitler, tellingly cited by Ross: "This is exactly the new state, for which the seed was already laid twenty years ago. Yes, a new state it is, one that has never existed before!! It is something new! Created by this unique man!!! . . . Each day becomes more exciting. I see such a good future. It will be different also for me."

extended discussion Sibelius, Copland, and Benjamin Britten, the last of whom he puts forward as an exemplary figure. Britten's desire to communicate with the largest possible audience of potential listeners was, for Ross, part and parcel of his greatness:

Britten provocatively compared the regimentation of culture in totalitarian states to the self-imposed regimentation of the avant-garde in democratic countries. Any ideological organization of music, he said, distorts a composer's natural voice, his "gift and personality." Everything about Britten's style—his deliberate parochialism, his tonal orientation, his preference for classical forms—went against the grain of the postwar era.

MOST INTERESTING of all is the optimism with which Ross portrays the contemporary music scene. This optimism is by no means unrealistic, for he is well aware of the extent to which, as I recently wrote, our

culture has "withdrawn its attention from classical music."\*

Over the course of the last century, Ross observes in the final chapter of *The Rest Is Noise*, the art of classical composition

experienced what can only be described as a fall from a great height. At the beginning of the 20th century, composers were cynosures on the world stage, their premieres mobbed by curiosity seekers. . . . A hundred years on, contemporary classical composers have largely vanished from the radar screen of mainstream culture.

Yet it is also true, as Ross points out, that classical music "is reaching far larger audiences than it has at any time in history," and that the rise of the new digital media offers classical musicians a new way to reach out to "subcultures and niche markets."

It may well be that the institutional life of classical music in the 21st century will not be centered on such time-honored institutions as big-city symphony orchestras and

opera companies. But this does not necessarily mean it will be inferior in quality to that which came before. What will matter more is whether the classical composers of today and tomorrow succeed in developing new styles to which new audiences can respond wholeheartedly.

Ross, if I read him right, believes that the future of classical music lies in an all-embracing eclecticism. It remains to be seen whether or not such eclecticism is capable of solving the problem to which the Hungarian composer György Ligeti alluded in 1993 when he complained that "I am in a prison: one wall is the avant-garde, the other wall is the past, and I want to escape." But when it comes to matters of art, the end, which is beauty, is always more important than the means. In *The Rest Is Noise*, Alex Ross shows himself to be a surpassingly eloquent advocate for beauty, by any means necessary.

\* "Selling Classical Music" (COMMENTARY, September 2007).



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## Books in Review

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### A Modest Proposal

Girls Gone Mild:  
Young Women Reclaim  
Self-Respect and Find It's  
Not Bad to Be Good

by Wendy Shalit

*Random House. 352 pp. \$25.95*

Reviewed by  
Sam Schulman

WENDY SHALIT's charming, moving, sometimes heart-breaking new book has dispiriting news for men over forty: now is an even better time to be a male adolescent on the hunt than when we were boys. It seems that the word "no"—the sound of which became familiar in response to our own adolescent importunities—has dropped out of the female vocabulary. Today's girls have become so inured that, simply to be agreeable, they willingly yield to boys' demands without feeling the least desire themselves.

SAM SCHULMAN reviewed *God Is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens in our June issue. He is the publishing director of *The American*.

What is more, according to Shalit, the institutions that formerly supported girls in their hesitations and demurrals have now, to a greater or lesser degree, abandoned them. For girls still "on the fence" about sex, the family, the schools, the mass media—even the feminists—too often conspire to push them off. As Shalit tells it, describing the case study of a fifteen-year-old whose boyfriend is pressuring her for sex:

Everyone—the pediatrician, the school nurse, the girl's therapist—is encouraging her to use birth control. Her mother is looking for a doctor who will recommend abstaining from sexual activity, but she can't find one. She keeps hearing, "The kids are all doing it anyway; you'll be saving her life." Today it is nearly impossible to find a medical professional who cares enough to ask a girl, "Why do you want to go on birth control?" Or to take the time to point out, "If he's pressuring you for sex, he probably doesn't love you."

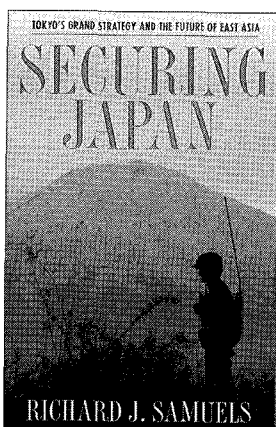
The consequences of this sexual complaisance are, for girls, dismal—as Shalit copiously documents in a

book based both on extensive interviews and on a thorough familiarity with the literature. Thanks to their encounters with boys, sexually active (i.e., promiscuous) girls are more likely than their virtuous peers to suffer from depression, to cut or otherwise mutilate themselves, to attempt suicide, to become victims of bullying, or to become bullies themselves. There is among girls a measurable falling-off of self-esteem, of self-assertion, and of happiness.

These are well-established facts, and surely they had something to do with the gradual and salutary drop-off in teenage sexual activity and pregnancy rates in the 1990's: the emotional price was just too high. But as has recently been reported, the decline appears now to have halted, for reasons no one can specify. Shalit's own answer would appear to be that, for many girls, culture is still a stronger determinant of behavior than either reason or instinct.

At some point, she suggests, it was "decided" that the natural tendency of young women to become emotionally attached to their sexual partners was a pathology that had to be overcome. Enter the "bad girl" phenomenon, a logical exten-

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sion of the feminist notion that girls are exactly the same as boys in all things, including in all things sexual. The bad girl—glorified, for example, in the commercial video franchise *Girls Gone Wild* as a hard-drinking, hard-partying, aggressively and vulgarly sexy exhibitionist with no constraints on her behavior—enjoys all the privileges and prerogatives of young men.

Or at least that is the fantasy. In real life, unfortunately, she has little or none of that other male sexual quality: cold-bloodedness. The result has been a steady decrease in female freedom, female self-respect, and female individuality—and a steady increase in female misery.

AND THE GOOD news? Shalit's evangel is that, spontaneously, many girls are beginning to resist—rediscovering the virtues of self-assertion by rejecting the expectations of others to be "people-pleasing bad girls." She introduces us to dozens of representative "girls gone mild" who have not only decided to dress and act more modestly themselves but have actively pressured department stores and mail-order businesses to offer less vulgar fashions for younger teens and lobbied schools to stop recommending overtly sexualized books to their students.

She is also confident that these girls speak for many more, and she rests that confidence not only in the proven example of her own subjects but in the power of the unleashed female instinct, even in the face of parental denial, indifference, or disapproval. Shalit quotes one of her correspondents:

I told my mom, you know, "I'm really proud of myself," and she was like, "What?" I said I'm proud of myself for getting through at least, like, most of high school, and like staying clean you know, like, without any moral scars and things like that . . . and she was like, "Yeah, I know." She totally blew it off but it's really the most important thing.

THIS IS A telling anecdote, for more than one reason. Most of us, having been teenage children ourselves, can easily believe that teenage children are capable of any sort of self-degradation. The "bad-girl" phenomenon, taken on its own, is thus understandable enough. Nor is it something new on the sexual scene—bad girls ye shall always have with you. But if it has assumed proportions today that were once unthinkable, that is because it is backed not only by the entertainment media but by legions of parents, teachers, librarians, psychologists, magazine editors, toy companies, editorialists, and other professional kibitzers, all of whom have become complicit in the degradation Shalit describes.

Shalit's villains—like the figure of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, they are, in truth, among the more fascinating characters in her drama—are almost always figures of authority, people who have a claim to superiority by virtue of their age, their role as parents, or their professional status. They include the male professor who suggests that a female student "dress more provocatively," the upper-middle-class do-gooders at NOW who refuse to condemn *Girls Gone Wild*, the middle-school teacher who encourages her girls to prepare simulated lap-dances for student recitals, "mothers defend[ing] see-through shirts, fathers rally[ing] for cleavage during the school day, and Catholic schoolteachers advocat[ing] for miniskirts."

In Shalit's re-creation, the vulgar sexualization against which her heroines struggle is thus in most cases something imposed on them not so much by their peers as by adults, in an act of imperialism *de haut en bas*. It is the authorities who have gone wild, and the young who suffer.

Frequently, black girls are the ones who suffer the most. In the words of Rashida Jolley, an African-American activist cited by Shalit:

People like to stereotype African-Americans as animalistic or whatever, and . . . say we don't

have control over ourselves. . . . Those same individuals . . . make an assumption that we are just going to have sex anyway, and we aren't capable of anything else.

There is also a perverse form of class snobbery at work. The particular expressions of female sexuality permitted or encouraged share a style for which the collective term is trash. Tobacco Road has come to Main Street, Park Avenue, and Sheridan Road. And this is an enormous innovation. For centuries, when it came to dress, family habits, tastes in art and culture, or educational ideals, children were urged by their parents to act like gentlemen and ladies. In pre-World War II movies, plucky typists played by Irene Dunn, Greer Garson, or Bette Davis carefully ironed their fluttery blouse collars so as to become the social equals of their bosses and avoid being high-hatted by their prospective mothers-in-law. Even a slutty Joan Blondell in *Three on a Match* could be a lady and marry Warren Williams; she did not need a Swiss finishing school for the purpose, just an ironing board.

Ten years ago, Elizabeth Wurtzel, in a now-forgotten book, proposed a replacement for these antique ideals: the Long Island "bitch" Amy Fisher, who at the age of seventeen attempted to murder her older boyfriend's wife, wielding a different kind of iron for the purpose. On a less lurid scale, parents have freed girls from expectations of lady-like behavior by giving them "Bratz" dolls for their tea parties and inventing the affectionate term "prostitots" for their little darlings.

Why? Shalit describes the process in horrifying detail, but does not ask what has driven it. Her young heroines, standing up to the demands of conformity and vulgarization, are indubitably courageous, and wise beyond their years. Still, the question remains: after generations of feminist lectures on female empowerment, after study upon study of the disempowering damage

done to women by their so-called sexual liberation, why do the "sisters" still turn away in disdain from this mini-movement for "mildness"?

Shalit's book has been attacked by one feminist critic for suggesting that the sex act "should have an everlasting warranty of love attached to it." To the contrary, writes Nona Willis-Aronowitz in the *Nation*, all girls should realize that sex

is the ultimate risk, a risk that makes human relationships complicated, intoxicating, and wonderful. It is a risk that women are finally allowed to take without being chastised for it.

Or, as Shalit herself quotes a feminist lawyer barking: "I am very suspicious of telling girls they need to be morally good—that's sexism right there!"

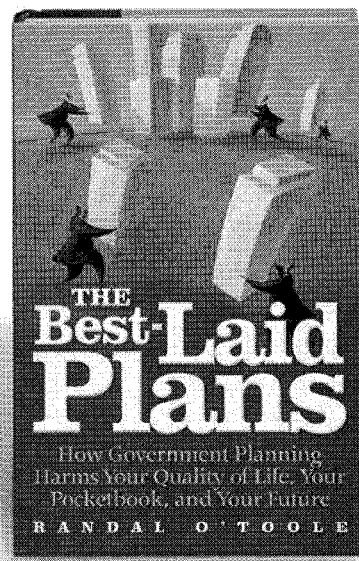
PROTECTING young girls from harm is sexism, while dissuading them from virtue is—virtuous? Confronted with this seeming paradox, trying to explain it rationally, an amateur anthropologist might begin by recalling the reason for the existence of sexual repression in the first place: namely, to civilize the world *within* the household. Conducive to this civilizing purpose is the often explosive sexuality of adolescence, which directs the nubile or sexually ready child out of the home and into the world to find an exogamous mate and continue the dance, founding another household and starting another generation—which must, for a time, be once again repressed.

But now we live in an age in which social organization and technology have worked a profound change in the nature of human households. We have ordinary households with two working and often absentee parents, with economic equality between men and women, with no separation between the spheres of men's work and women's work—and with a high and unremarkable incidence of di-

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vorce. Could it be that, in these circumstances, parents are, with reason, more anxious than ever to prepare children for life outside the home—a home that may not exist in a year or two? If so, then perhaps all this dressing-up of their little elementary- or middle-school girls in black fishnet stockings, miniskirts, partly revealed thongs, and cerise halter tops—this exercise in turning them into “prostitutots”—is a rationally defensible means of preparing them to survive in a world where courtship is non-existent, chivalry dead, and marriage meaningless, where a man’s contribution to the family is fleeting, and where female aggressiveness toward other, rival females is to be taken for granted, a matter of expedient common sense.

End of thought experiment. If there is anything to it, then more than one book, brave and wonderful though this one is, will be needed to help turn us around. But *Girls Gone Mild* is definitely a good place to start.

## Two Apes on a Treadmill?

### Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race

by Richard Rhodes

Knopf. 400 pp. \$28.95

Reviewed by  
Gabriel Schoenfeld

WHAT WAS the nuclear arms race between the U.S. and the USSR all about? Who started it, what fueled it, who deserves blame for the dangers of the nearly five-decade-long contest and credit for bringing it to a close?

These questions are not merely of historical interest. They touch upon

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD is the senior editor of COMMENTARY.

the nature of national power in the nuclear age, and they also bear on our current dilemmas with North Korea, Iran, and others. Richard Rhodes, a highly regarded historian who has written comprehensive accounts of the making of the A-bomb and the H-bomb, has now delved into the major issues involved. There is therefore ample reason to welcome the appearance of *Arsenals of Folly*—or so one would think.

RHODES BEGINS his narrative not at the dawn of the nuclear age but near its terminus, in the 1986 disaster at the Soviet nuclear-power station at Chernobyl. Deploying his considerable talents as a storyteller, he evokes the horrific toll taken by the catastrophe—human, economic, and environmental. Above all, he strives to convey how the event was experienced by those, especially the newly ascendant Mikhail Gorbachev, who dealt with its consequences firsthand. What the radiation disaster unambiguously confirmed for the Soviet leader, Rhodes writes, was the sheer unacceptability of a nuclear war.

Keeping his eye throughout on the endgame of the nuclear competition, Rhodes next steps backward to reconstruct its history. What exactly had been driving the two sides to amass huge collections of warheads with enough explosive potential to destroy each other many times over?

Regarding the Soviet side, Rhodes paints a surprising picture. In his telling, the post-Stalinist leadership had understood the unacceptable consequences of a nuclear exchange from the very beginning. As early as 1953, Nikita Khrushchev had been deeply shaken by his first briefing on the subject: “I became convinced,” he would recollect much later, “that we could never possibly use these weapons, and when I realized that, I was able to sleep again.” Although Khrushchev and subsequent Soviet rulers would engage in bellicose rhetoric from time to time, rhetoric

was all it was. The masters of the Kremlin never seriously entertained the idea of fighting a nuclear war with the United States.

Unfortunately, Rhodes adds, whatever the intentions at the top, the Soviet leadership repeatedly had to accommodate pressure from below. Thanks to the twin influences of central planning and the martial legacy of World War II, a bureaucratic perpetual-motion machine ceaselessly churned out weapons in quantities far exceeding any rational defensive need. The “unintended consequence” of this “military-industrial dominance of government policy,” explains Rhodes, “was the piling up of Soviet arms” during the very period in the 1970’s “when both the Soviet Union and the United States were pursuing policies of détente.”

EVEN MORE unfortunate, in Rhodes’s telling, was the fact that during those same years, policymakers in the U.S. became deeply divided about what was happening in the USSR and how best to respond to it. On one side, he writes, were those who grasped the core fact: in an age of weapons of total destruction, the intensive Soviet build-up had no genuine military significance. On the other, winning side were hardliners who saw only the surface reality, feared what they saw, and whipped up the fears of others to the point where the U.S., like the USSR, was propelled into acquiring its own huge quantity of useless arms.

Thus did the two superpowers come to resemble, in Rhodes’s account, “blind, plodding oxen of mutual belligerence.” With strategic decisions on both sides anchored in one or another species of irrationality, it is no wonder that the entire nuclear confrontation would become a resource sink. Each side devoted vast amounts of national treasure to a rivalry based on a misapprehension of the other side’s intentions. Fearing the United States, the USSR viewed every American

weapons acquisition as a mortal threat. The U.S. behaved the same way. The result was the creation of those two “arsenals of folly,” the title and point of Rhodes’s book.

WHAT TO SAY of this account? A first and fundamental flaw is its treatment of the USSR. As is clear from the footnotes, which point exclusively to secondary sources, Rhodes does not know Russian. Nor does he know Russia, or Russian leaders. Burnishing the reputation of Nikita Khrushchev, for example, Rhodes hails him as a reformer of the USSR’s legal system who, following Stalin’s death in 1953, initiated a variety of forward-looking policies—including, “most of all, the restoration of due process in political cases.”

As the Soviet politburo said of Khrushchev when they deposed him from power in 1963, this is “harebrained.” In the Soviet context, the very idea of applying due process to “political cases” is itself a contradiction in terms. The most that can be said for Khrushchev in this connection—and it is not inconsiderable given what came before him—is that during his reign, mass arrests ceased and political dissenters were no longer shot but imprisoned. But that is hardly the same thing as “due process.”

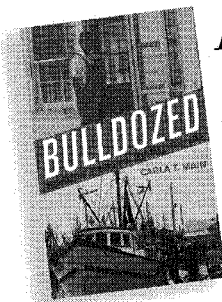
Rhodes’s account of the Soviet nuclear question in the 1950’s and early 60’s is equally twisted, especially in its rendering of Khrushchev as a kind of Russian Mahatma Gandhi. The leader whom Rhodes quotes as saying he “could never possibly use” nuclear weapons was to use them repeatedly—not, to be sure, by detonating them on enemy territory but by testing a great many of them in the atmosphere and aggressively deploying them in Cuba for strategic gain. Explaining such behavior as essentially defensive, or as the product of insecurity in the face of American power, is unpersuasive on its face, and Rhodes’s struggle to stuff conflicting evi-

dence into a suitcase where it will not fit is risible.

Turning to Gorbachev, Rhodes heaps accolade after accolade on that leader for his role in peacefully ending the cold war. Gorbachev does unquestionably deserve a measure of credit here; as the empire around him collapsed against his will, he chose not to order tanks into the streets. But does that mean

this man who rose sedulously through the ranks of the Soviet Communist party apparatus over a period of decades must be mythologized as a reformer from the very outset of his career?

Rhodes has done exactly that, lamely trying to silence objections by asserting that a mental process of “compartmentalization” had enabled Gorbachev “to bury his doubts



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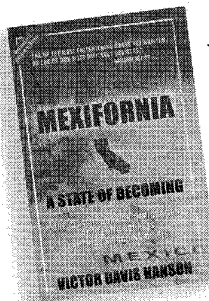
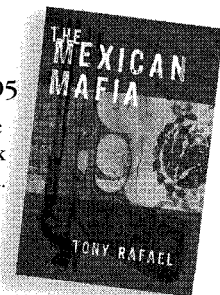
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[about the Soviet system] during his rise to power" and also helped him "to conceal his radicalism from his politburo colleagues." This is just Rhodes adding more gloss to a career spent licking the boots of a succession of brutish leaders, including Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko. Rhodes's primary source for his generous account, unsurprisingly, is Gorbachev's own self-serving memoirs, treated by him as unerringly true gospel.

IF RHODES searches for every opportunity, no matter how happenstance, to cast his Soviet subjects in a sympathetic light (in one particularly ludicrous passage, he even lauds the Ph.D. dissertation written by Gorbachev's wife Raisa—its subject was the conditions on Soviet collective farms—for "add[ing] to Gorbachev's understanding of democratic process"), his tune abruptly changes when he turns to the American side. Here we meet a succession of dangerous ideologues and dyed-in-the-wool war-mongers, some of whom were haunted by personal demons.

A case in point for Rhodes is the American strategist Paul Nitze, who in 1950, while working for the National Security Council, authored NSC-68, one of the key documents of postwar American foreign policy. This analysis of American national security featured an "egregious exaggeration" of Soviet war-fighting ability. Where did it come from? Rhodes finds a clue in Nitze's memoirs, where he would write that as a ten-year-old boy in Chicago he had felt compelled to join a gang in order to gain protection against another and even fiercer gang. This experience, Rhodes maintains, was what led the adult Nitze to imagine the men in the Kremlin as "masters of evil—a small boy's view of a menacing gang."

But the psychologically damaged Nitze was just one of an entire "team of sorcerer's apprentices,

whose trail of wreckage extends into the present century." Among them, Rhodes names Richard Perle, who sported "characteristic dark circles around his eyes even as a young man," the "waspy" Richard Pipes, whose "paranoid" formulations in the pages of COMMENTARY were translated into policy during his term in the Reagan White House, "neoconservatives" like Paul Wolfowitz, and a collection of other "hardliners" including Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and of course Reagan himself.

As opposed to the ever more clear-eyed Gorbachev, the Reagan of Rhodes's narrative is presented as a man with a blinkered mind, incapable of grasping or generating any form of abstract thought. Reagan's way of approaching the world, Rhodes helpfully explicates, was "characteristic of religious, and particularly of fundamentalist, thinking, an archaic mode in which facts are allegorized into parables." The fantasizing Reagan was thus predisposed to a "totalizing anti-Communism" that in turn fueled his "militant rhetoric" and made him spurn "negotiation as a path to ending the nuclear arms race."

It was Reagan, we learn in this book, who recklessly brought the world to the brink of actual nuclear war in the early 1980's by engaging in a military build-up that the Soviet leaders were convinced was preparatory to a preemptive American strike. American military maneuvers during Reagan's presidential tenure repeatedly forced the USSR into a reactive posture. Thus, when a South Korean Boeing 747 passenger jet strayed into Soviet territory in 1983, and the Soviet military shot it down, killing 269 civilians, "some share of the blame for the loss of innocent life," writes Rhodes, "surely belongs . . . to the Reagan administration."

RICHARD RHODES enjoys the reputation of a distinguished historian. What could possibly explain his re-

lentless inversion of the history of the cold war, his embarrassingly fawning treatment of Soviet leadership, his almost visceral revulsion for the American side?

As it happens, such inclinations are not new with him. Intimations of them were visible in previous books as well, and especially in *Dark Sun* (1995), his history of the first hydrogen bomb.\* But that at least was a serious work of scholarship; however one might dispute Rhodes's benign interpretation of Soviet conduct or his tendency to place the onus for the cold war on the United States, he still offered in *Dark Sun* an informed and mostly reliable account of his principal subject.

*Arsenals of Folly* is a different story altogether, a work contaminated by animus through and through. Relying on a range of anti-American scholar-activists like Richard J. Barnet and Jonathan Schell, and left-wing journalists like Sidney Blumenthal and Seymour Hersh, Rhodes has falsified the history of the arms race in the service of a particular cause. Nor is the nature of that cause a secret. It is spelled out on the dust-jacket, where readers are invited to savor a "narrative that reads like a thriller" and instructed they will learn from it "how militant conservatives, including Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Perle, use[d] threat inflation and fear-mongering—strategies they would use again to promote the war with Iraq—as impetus for the Reagan administration's unprecedented arms build-up" (emphasis added).

The point of this book, it emerges, is thus to project the past onto the present in order to vilify the Bush administration and its war to depose Saddam Hussein. In his own concluding words, Rhodes writes that the "militarization" of America under Bush has bequeathed to us "ramshackle cities, broken bridges, failing schools, entrenched poverty, imped-

\* See Walter A. McDougall's review in the October 1995 COMMENTARY.

ed life expectancy, and a menacing and secretive national-security state that [holds] the entire human world hostage." So now we know the true origins of our own homegrown American brand of totalitarianism.

Understanding the past in order to understand the present is what history is all about. Exploiting the past to score political points in a contemporary debate is not history but propaganda. If *Arsenals of Folly* is indeed a work of history, it is one only in the Soviet sense, the sense in which the past is brazenly rewritten to bring it into conformity with the party line of the moment.

### Stick Figure

Mere Anarchy  
by Woody Allen

Random House. 160 pp. \$21.95

Reviewed by  
Benjamin A. Plotinsky

THIRTY YEARS ago, my parents bought tickets to Woody Allen's brand-new movie *Annie Hall*, thinking that it might serve to distract my mother from her advanced pregnancy with me. But the plan backfired; in the middle of the movie their unborn child started to give frantic signs of wanting out—forcing them to get out, too. So I have been a critic of Allen's from an early-enough age to accept philosophically the deficiencies of *Mere Anarchy*, his fourth collection of short stories and his first since 1980. Admirers of Allen's earlier fiction, however, are in for a disappointment: only a couple of the book's eighteen pieces, ten of which have

BENJAMIN A. PLOTINSKY contributed "At Home with 'The Sopranos'" to our July-August issue. He is the managing editor of the Manhattan Institute's City Journal.

already appeared in the *New Yorker*, rival his witty "Conversations with Helmholtz" (1971) or "The Whore of Mensa" (1974).

I revisited *Annie Hall* recently and found it somewhat improved. In it, Allen's character Alvy Singer is a neurotic comedian far more interesting than Diane Keaton's Annie Hall, who exists chiefly to take in Allen's wisecracks. The charac-

ters' names are no accident. Annie is the concert hall for Alvy's comic singing, and her purpose, like the purpose of the movie named after her, is to reflect the sounds that he emits.

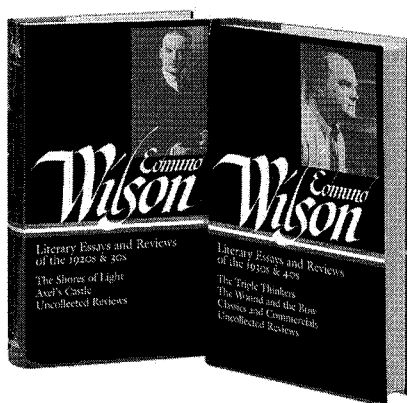
Something similar might be said about the purpose of many of these stories. But the difference—and it is an important difference—is that in *Annie Hall* the last word belongs to

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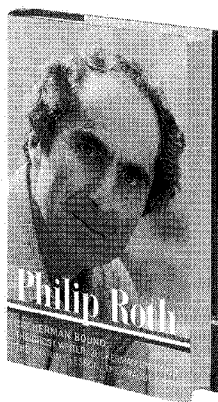
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A TRILOGY AND EPILOGUE 1979-1985

Ross Miller, editor



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the screenwriter/director Woody Allen, who is wise enough to ridicule the unengaging Alvy. In *Mere Anarchy*, there is no ridicule, and the author's voice sounds very much like Alvy's own.

THIS WOULD not be a Woody Allen collection without at least a few deft parodies. Although Kaiser Lupowitz, the Raymond Chandleresque sleuth of earlier Allen stories, does not make an appearance, some readers might enjoy a takeoff of Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* in which the trophy "MacGuffin" is not a large black bird but an expensive truffle. In one climactic line the fat man, a carbon copy of Gutman in Hammett's novel, realizes with horror that the truffle he has pursued for so long is phony:

"My God, sir!" he screamed. "It's a fake! And while it's a brilliant fake, counterfeited to simulate some of the truffle's nutlike flavor, I'm afraid what we have here is a large matzo ball."

Taking the same tone is "Pinchuck's Law," narrated by a hard-boiled NYPD detective who, setting out to solve a string of murders, trips lightly over a series of crime-story clichés along the way. "The Rejection," another parody, zanily employs the style of a 19th-century Russian novel to tell the story of Boris Ivanovich, whose son has been spurned by an exclusive Manhattan nursery school. ("[Boris] pictured three-year-olds in Bonpoint outfits cutting and pasting and then having some comforting snack—a cup of juice and perhaps a Goldfish or a chocolate graham. If Mischa could be denied this, there was no meaning in life or in all of existence.") "Calisthenics, Poison Ivy, Final Cut" is a series of letters between a Wall Street blueblood, whose son has been offered \$16 million by a Hollywood studio for a movie he has made at film camp, and the camp's wily proprietor, Moe Varnishke, who threatens obliquely to

destroy the film's negative if he is denied a piece of the action.

Allen is at his best in the parodies, where he has a fixed literary model both to imitate and to depart from, and in the epistolary exchange, which resembles a screenplay in that it consists solely of dialogue. But when left to his own devices—when he is neither parodying someone else nor just writing dialogue—he gets into trouble.

In many of the stories in *Mere Anarchy*—they tend to be the ones that never appeared in the *New Yorker*—he tries repeatedly to milk laughs from the improbable words of both the characters and the narrator. Seldom, for example, does anyone in these stories *say* anything: instead, they parry, squeak, yelp, chirp, chuckle, pipe, bid, announce, and "fonfer." In one story, an untalented actor who has found work as a lighting double is kidnapped by the inept followers of an Indian bandit:

"I send you out to snatch a cinema luminary, and this is what you bring me?" the hash-high CEO ranted, nostrils flaring like sails that had caught the wind.

"Master, I beg you," groveled the Dalit hailed as Abu.

"A stand-in, a supernumerary not even—a lighting double," the *grand fromage* bellowed.

"But you will agree there's a resemblance, master?" squeaked one trembling plaintiff.

And so on, as though the text had been run through some riotous Microsoft Word function that merged the Find-and-Replace and The-saurus tools.

A CLUE TO what fills Allen's own sails with wind may lie in "Strung Out," a story that imports the language of particle physics into an office romance ("All I knew was that I wanted to wrap my weak-gauge bosons around her gluons"), and in "Sing, You Sacher Tortes," a description of a musical about turn-of-the-century Vienna whose "open-

ing number [has] Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Adolf Loos singing 'Form Follows Function.'" Neither is very funny; their main purpose seems to be to impress us with how much Allen knows, with the jokes serving—unsuccessfully—to keep us from being put off by his bragging.

The obsession with outlandish words is a lexical version of the same tactic, undercut by the fact that Allen's vocabulary is fairly limited and therefore annoyingly repetitive. He uses "myrmidons" in three different stories, "lagniappe" in three, "exaltation" (as in "an exaltation of larks") in three, "sconce" (meaning "head") more times than I could count. You do not have to be Flaubert to be unimpressed.

The same redundancy, finally, applies to characters and situations, and to even more unpleasant effect. Certain writers (Conrad and Hardy, for example) like to spring a character from a previous work on their readers, giving us the pleasure of running unexpectedly into an old friend. In *Mere Anarchy*, the feeling is more like running unexpectedly into a pointy stick. The main recurring character, or rather caricature, who goes by different names in different stories, is essentially the same person: a loud, vulgar Jew, spewing a mixture of absurd slang and Yiddish, always on the lookout for Number One, usually at the expense of the naïve and meeker narrator.

In the collection's first story, the caricature is named Max Endorphine. "What can I tell you, boychick, I hit it big," he gloats in describing a guru who has supposedly taught him to levitate; of course the gullible narrator gets into trouble when he tries to duplicate the feat. In the second story, he is Pontius Perry, the agent who unloads the role of lighting double on that talentless actor: "Let me level with you, boychick," Perry says as he breaks the bad news. (Does any real-life Jew ever use the word "boychick"?) In the fourth story, a crass

producer named E. Coli Biggs wants the narrator to write movie novelizations. "Here's the scam, tatellah," he begins. "I happen to own the rights to a cinema classic starring the Three Stooges . . . a real zany vehicle for our three most irrepressible meshoogs." Of the eight new stories in the book, the same repellent character appears in four, and then pops up again two or three times later.

The charge of anti-Semitism has been leveled at Woody Allen so many times as to sound unoriginal. Without rehearsing all the evidence and counter-arguments, the very least one can say is that, when it comes to seizing on a tired stereotype and utterly exhausting it, Allen has shown himself a modern master of unoriginality.

How THEN to explain the charm of his best movies? The answer is that they do not ask us to admire the character he himself most often plays: a pathetically neurotic, self-centered, wanly wisecracking intellectual or pseudo-intellectual. By contrast, the problem with most of the stories in *Mere Anarchy* is that they do not stand outside this character; instead, they are *written* by him. Their "implied author" (to use the terminology of the late critic Wayne Booth) is none other than that selfsame pseudo-intellectual—who to boot, and for no discernible reason, asks the reader to regard him as a superior human type.

As I noted earlier, two or three of the stories in *Mere Anarchy*—especially "The Rejection" and "Calisthenics, Poison Ivy, Final Cut"—show that when Allen manages to speak in voices that are foreign to him, he is still capable of crafting good fiction. Readers interested in pursuing other examples should investigate *The Insanity Defense*, a one-volume edition of his three previous collections. But anyone looking to experience his best work should skip the prose altogether and sit down with a few of his classic movies.

## Novel & Novelist

Ralph Ellison

by Arnold Rampersad

Knopf: 657 pp. \$35.00

Reviewed by  
Algis Valiunas

THERE ARE no second acts in American lives, the meteoric F. Scott Fitzgerald observed, lamenting his own fleeting glory and prolonged desuetude. Arnold Rampersad reflects on that remark in his new biography of the writer Ralph Ellison, whose 1952 debut novel *Invisible Man* made him the most visible black artist in American history,

ALGIS VALIUNAS writes widely on culture and politics. His article, "Fire from the Sky," appeared in our July-August issue.

but who spent the rest of his life trying and failing to complete a second novel that would outshine the first. Rampersad, a Stanford English professor best known for his two-volume biography of the poet Langston Hughes, has written a distinguished but unforgiving life of Ellison, in which his second-act failures as man and artist weigh rather more heavily than his sterling success.

Ralph Waldo Ellison—the high-toned literary name would dog him until he finally grew into it—was born in Oklahoma City in 1913. His father, a coal and ice delivery man, died when Ralph was three, and the family would struggle thereafter to make ends meet. From the age of twelve Ralph worked as a boot black, bread-and-butter boy, and short-order cook, but even in the Jim Crow world of Oklahoma he dreamed of great things. As he would write in the introduction to *Shadow and Act*,

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his 1964 essay collection:

We felt, among ourselves at least, that we were supposed to be whoever we would and could be and do anything and everything which other boys did, and do it better. Not defensively, because we were ordered to do so; nor because it was held in the society at large that we were naturally, as Negroes, limited—but because we demanded it of ourselves. . . . Hence it was no more incongruous, as seen from our particular perspective in this land of incongruities, for young Negro Oklahomans to project themselves as Renaissance Men than for white Mississippians to see themselves as ancient Greeks or noblemen out of Sir Walter Scott.

The young Renaissance man believed his future lay in music, as a classical composer. Short on money, he hopped freights like a hobo to get to the Tuskegee Institute in rural Alabama, where he was sure his talents would blossom. But despite one nourishing friendship and the benefits of a good library, he found Tuskegee a disappointment—a homosexual dean hounded him, and evidently exacted sexual favors—and he headed off to New York without taking a degree.

New York was the place he had been made for. At the YMCA he met Langston Hughes, who befriended him instantly, lending him novels by André Malraux, taking him to a party at Duke Ellington's. He found work as a receptionist for the noted psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan, dabbled in sculpture, haunted the used-book stores, learned about leftist politics. The black Communist writer Richard Wright convinced him to try writing a short story for the magazine *New Challenge*; the story, based on Ellison's experience riding the rails to Tuskegee, was accepted, but the magazine folded before it could be published.

WHEN ELLISON's mother died in Dayton, Ohio—a doctor had misdi-

agnosed her tuberculosis of the hip, enraging Ellison at what Rampersad calls "black bourgeois incompetence"—he lived there for several months with his mentally slow brother, Herbert, sleeping in a friend's car in the dead of winter. But he had begun to write in earnest, and when he returned to New York—he left Herbert behind, and would not see him again for 26 years—it was with a new resolve. "WORKERS OF THE WORLD MUST WRITE!!!" he declared in a note to Wright.

He caught on as a reviewer, essayist, and fiction writer for *New Masses*, and soon the Communist literary world, smiling upon his boilerplate, saw him as Wright's successor. Stalinist claptrap beguiled him; he clung to the party line as if by suction, defending the Moscow show trials (a just response to "widespread sabotage and wrecking"), the party's proposal to establish an autonomous black state in the American South, and Stalin's 1939 pact with Hitler. Only in 1941, when the wartime Nazi peril to the Soviet Union prompted the party to court the white Southern masses and ignore black civil rights, did Ellison finally break with Communism.

He probably started *Invisible Man* in July 1945. "The break with the [Communist party] has allowed me to come alive," he told Wright. Jazz, the blues, and the work of European writers like Kafka were, according to Rampersad, the new life-giving influences on Ellison's art. Excerpts from the novel began appearing in esteemed literary journals in 1947, but Ellison's ambition was to produce the best book he could, which made the writing a slow and painstaking process. When the result was finally published in 1952, it was abundantly clear that the pains had been worth it.

Most white reviewers of *Invisible Man*, including Delmore Schwartz, Irving Howe, and Saul Bellow (writing in COMMENTARY), were emphatically praiseful. The National Book Award for fiction, conferred by

a panel that included Bellow, Howe, and Alfred Kazin, who preferred Ellison's novel to Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, certified the triumph. Black reviewers, however, composed dire rants, accusing Ellison of moral hate crimes against his own people. (A dissenter from the chorus was Richard Wright: "You've entered the ranks of literature," he enthused in a letter, "and there is no doubt about it.")

In writing *Invisible Man*, Ellison drew on his experiences of Jim Crow Oklahoma, Tuskegee, Harlem, and Communist politics. In the characteristic manner of the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of education, the book demonstrates the many ways a serious man must go wrong before he can manage to find his true course. It takes the narrator from the humiliations of the racist South, where as a boy he participates in an especially vicious free-for-all boxing match with other black youths for the entertainment of the town's white grandees; to his beloved college, from which he is expelled for taking a white trustee to visit an incestuous sharecropper and his family, the shame of all respectable black folk; and to Harlem, where a spontaneous tirade at white injustice leads for a time to a leftist political career.

The narrator shares the common condition of American blacks in that era, and to a degree perhaps in our own:

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. . . . When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.

But his most desperate plight is that, for much of the book, he is invisible to himself. Only by a series of jolts does he become aware that he possesses a true self, which his upbringing has occluded. A revelation comes when he joyfully eats a bunch of hot buttered yams on a

Harlem street corner—the kind of food, like chitterlings and pig's ears, he has been taught to despise as unbefitting a Negro of refinement. "What and how much had I lost by trying to do only what was expected of me instead of what I myself had wished to do?" The question of appropriate sustenance then swells into the largest human questions: who am I, and how am I to live?

These questions the novel will leave unanswered. More serious trials lie in store, particularly to do with the Brotherhood, an organization essentially indistinguishable from the Communist party whose magniloquent stooge the hero becomes, and from which he breaks in the end. But even in the end he is still unfree and unfinished, finding refuge in a literally underground existence.

*Invisible Man* undoubtedly belongs among the outstanding American novels of the past century. To surpass or even to equal such an achievement was a tall order, and, try as he might, Ellison was never up to the task. Two-thousand manuscript pages yielded only an unvanquished behemoth, of which a fragment was published posthumously as *June-teenth*, a dog's banquet of (as Norman Podhoretz has pointed out) spurious Faulknerian eloquence.

To fill the void of this uncompleted work, Ellison drank, cheated on his beautiful and heroically loving second wife, and brawled—verbally, at least by his own account, though he was known to tell literary enemies he carried a knife. James Baldwin, whom he treated with contempt, called him the angriest man he knew. Ishmael Reed, whose 1972 novel *Mumbo Jumbo* celebrates the joyous spontaneity of black culture, violated Ellison's stricture that cultural achievement can only be the result of iron discipline, wresting order from chaos. At an American Academy of Arts and Letters ceremony where Reed was honored, Ellison shouted at the young pretender, "Ishmael Reed!

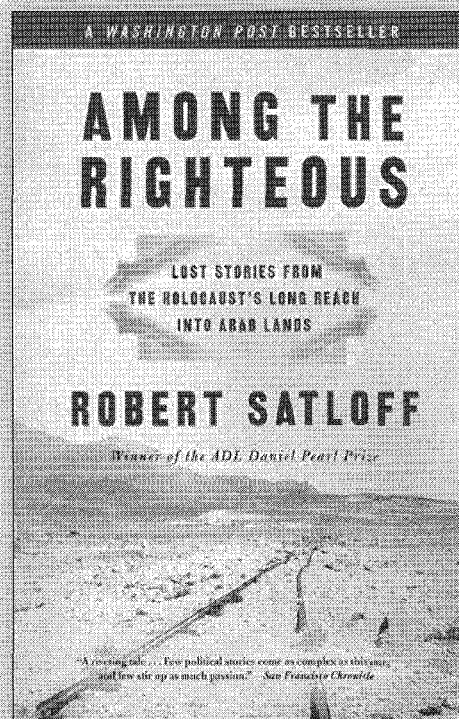
Ishmael Reed! You're nothing but a gangster and a con artist!"

Ellison tended to give the back of his hand to younger black writers who sought him out; he lived at a level they could not hope to reach. Instead, he became a member of the white liberal establishment, serving on a long list of boards, panels, and commissions and occupying the most prestigious and lucrative pro-

fessorial chair at New York University. He prided himself on remaining a Negro when the preferred term became black, which to his nose carried an unsavory whiff of radical ideology.

Nobly, and with consummate prudence, Ellison reviled the black separatists of the 1960's and 70's, and revered the integrationist Lyndon Johnson. In 1963, he engaged

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in serious intellectual dispute with Irving Howe, who had championed Richard Wright's 1940 novel *Native Son* at Ellison's expense, and to whom Ellison responded with disdain as one among other "sociology-oriented critics" oblivious to literary excellence and the autonomy of the imagination. But over time he would become more indiscriminate and self-contradictory in his choice of enemies and friends. He attacked noted COMMENTARY writers as "new apologists for segregation"; found Ronald Reagan guilty of "dismantling many of the processes and structures that made it possible for me to go from sleeping on a park bench to becoming a writer"; and supported the presidential candidacy of Jesse Jackson.

IN THE WORDS of the poet Allen Tate, "When the smoke of battle begins to clear, [Ellison] will be there as the authentic culture-hero." Not everyone would agree—not even, it would seem, his biographer.

Rampersad cites various authorities on the reasons for Ellison's post-*Invisible Man* failure. One of them is Toni Morrison, the first black woman Nobel laureate for literature and a novelist whose achievement, in Rampersad's estimation, has outstripped Ellison's. In Morrison's view, "The contemporary world of late 20th-century African Americans was largely inaccessible, or simply uninteresting to [Ellison] as a creator of fiction. For him, in essence, the eye, the gaze of the beholder remained white." More convincingly, the black critic Stanley Crouch cites Saul Bellow, who told him Ellison was bedeviled and finally overpowered by the "ethnic desire, on behalf of black or Negro people, to have a black writer create literature at the level of Faulkner, Hemingway, or even Melville."

For his own part, Rampersad tends to combine Morrison's explanation with Bellow's. In assessing not only Ellison's professional life but also his personal life, he comes

down hard on the writer's "punitive reserve with most blacks (whom he associated with poverty and ignorance) and his ambition to scale cultural heights attained thus far, in his opinion, only by whites."

Rampersad does not say which black writers, in his opinion, have attained the heights of Faulkner and Melville. But when we gauge the relative merits of *Invisible Man*, a book that many literary types have called the greatest American novel of the half-century from 1950 to 2000, other, nearer touchstones are at hand. Like his narrator/protagonist, Ellison sees his way into the problems of discovering an authentic self, and brilliantly creates a series of traps insidious as quicksand in which the narrator flounders; yet he cannot really see his way out into the light and air where that self may flourish. In this respect, as in others—the relative energy of the prose, abundance of vivid character, sheer brainpower—*Invisible Man*, while an undeniable literary triumph of the first order, must finally also be judged a lesser work than Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, which appeared to great acclaim the year after Ellison's novel.

Ellison died in 1994, and Rampersad makes even his funeral sound like a bitterly exclusive and excluding affair. In his book, this proud, lonely, and angry man certainly gets his comeuppance. Rampersad's is the first biography of Ellison, and its stylish comprehensiveness pretty much obviates the need for another any time soon. That is all the more reason why one wishes Rampersad had not so clearly diminished Ellison's splendid first act, an achievement that has yet to be equaled by any other black writer, or indeed by any but the finest writers of any color.

## Off Base

### The Argument: Billionaires, Bloggers, and the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics

by Matt Bai

Penguin. 336 pp. \$25.95

Reviewed by  
Dan DiSalvo

THE FIRST six years of the new century were dark times for Democrats. Republicans appeared to be inexorably expanding their majorities in all the nation's electoral institutions. With President George W. Bush's reelection in 2004, Democratic strength in the modern era reached a low ebb. Not until last year, when the Iraq war, Hurricane Katrina, and a series of congressional scandals led to a Republican implosion and the loss of both houses of Congress, did light begin to shine on the party once more.

During its spell in the wilderness, the "progressive" faction of the Democratic party became greatly energized. Matt Bai, an enterprising and talented writer for the *New York Times Magazine*, spent a good deal of time circulating among the leading protagonists of this movement and recording what he heard and saw. The result is *The Argument*, a fascinating behind-the-scenes tour through what Howard Dean, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee and himself a major figure among the new progressives, has called "the Democratic wing of the Democratic party."

Three interlocking elements comprise this coalition. One is a collection of billionaires (and millionaires) led by the financier George Soros, the insurance tycoon Peter Lewis, and a bevy of Hollywood icons. These joined together

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to create something called the Democracy Alliance, which serves as a clearinghouse for their political pocket-change. Most of these ultra-rich people are baby-boomers galvanized by the Iraq war, and some of them by nostalgic memories of their earlier opposition to the American role in Vietnam.

The second group is the “net-roots,” or liberal bloggers. A number of these online commentators—the top two are Markos Moulitsas Zúniga, the proprietor of *dailynos.com*, and Jerome Armstrong of *MyDD.com*—run hard-hitting political websites that draw over a half-million readers a day. The bloggers tend to be thirty-something white males, generally lacking experience in hands-on electoral battles.

The third element is a complex of grassroots campaign organizations (including *MoveOn.org* and

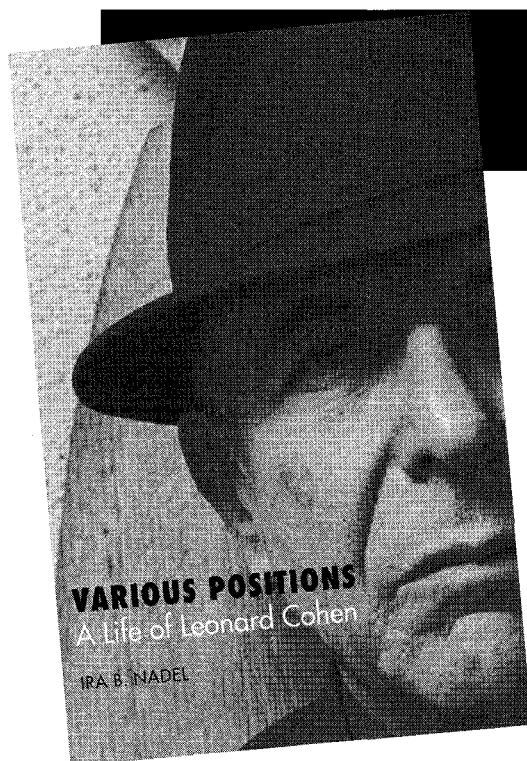
ACORN), political-action committees (Simon Rosenberg’s New Democratic Network), and Left-leaning think tanks (John Podesta’s Center for American Progress) that can help provide candidates with a message and also turn out the vote.

According to Bai, the new progressive coalition is primarily united by what it is *against*. Its opposition to the Iraq war is ferocious. The person of George W. Bush, who has been described by one activist as a “chicken hawk” bent on instituting a “dictatorship,” elicits emotions of universal fear and loathing. Bush aside, almost any policy initiative associated with the Republican party is regarded as stupid, malicious, or both.

But the new progressives have great difficulty in saying what they are *for*. Although Bai reports that intellectual circles on the Left have put forth many technocratic policy

prescriptions, mostly aimed at extending the programs of the New Deal and the Great Society, the movement lacks any sort of larger vision. A typical statement from the Democracy Alliance proclaimed support for such vagaries as “the highest quality education, affordable health care, retirement security, and the opportunity to earn a living wage.” Similarly, *MoveOn.org* was able to distill only three goals from a series of tightly scripted “meet-ups” held across the country: “health care for all, energy independence, and democracy restored.”

Despite this paltry output, the new progressives are convinced not only of their intellectual superiority but of their political acumen. They see only two possible explanations for the errant behavior of Americans in the “fly-over” states who remain stubbornly in the Republican column. One is that red-state residents



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tend to be Christian evangelicals who do not know any better than to “vote against their own economic self-interest.” The other is that they have been manipulated by Republican operatives who, however dim-witted their policies, are cunning masters of electioneering. Some bloggers also complain that establishment Democrats, as the Daily Kos has explained, “don’t care [enough] about winning” to engage in the sort of campaign skullduggery that is routine for the GOP.

With such convictions as the backdrop, debate inside the Democratic party’s “Democratic wing,” Bai shows, is less about policy than about tactics and strategy. But even at that level, the new progressives have enjoyed success only on the margins. Their most publicly visible foray, Ned Lamont’s successful bid for the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate in Connecticut in 2006, ended in ashes when the centrist incumbent Joseph Lieberman won the general election running on an independent ticket.

In digesting defeats like that one, Bai writes, the new progressives oscillate between denial that anything is wrong with their message and blaming their messengers. The denial reflex is best expressed in a proposal by George Lakoff, a linguistics professor and liberal activist, to “reframe” Democratic policies, not by rethinking the policies themselves but simply by changing the words used to describe them. The blame-the-messenger position is expressed best in the claim, leveled by the Daily Kos and others, that too many establishment Democrats

continue to commit the strategic error of searching for the “mythical middle” of the American electorate.

AS AN UP-CLOSE and personal account of the new progressive movement, Bai’s book hits the mark; it succeeds handsomely in bringing to life and illustrating the passions of a number of the leading luminaries of today’s Left. Although Bai writes sympathetically about some of these activists and holds his own political cards close to the vest, it is clear that he is ultimately highly skeptical of their project and leans more to the sort of Clintonism (Bill Clintonism, that is) associated with the Democratic Leadership Council and efforts to find a “third way” between Left and Right. No political movement, he maintains, will enjoy sustainable success if it does not stand for something. Rather than reframing and repositioning, the best way to win elections is to craft a coherent public philosophy that can credibly claim to advance the public interest.

But if this is sensible enough, *The Argument* also suffers from weaknesses that are akin, ironically, to those Bai pinpoints in the politics of the new progressives. One is a thin grasp of how modern liberalism arrived at its present sorry condition. Why, by the turn of the 21st century, had the Democratic party come to resemble “nothing so much as a hollow-eye, stubble-faced craps player in the early hours of the morning”? Like the billionaires and bloggers, Bai himself does not seem to remember the issues—racial preferences, crime, abortion, taxes, the

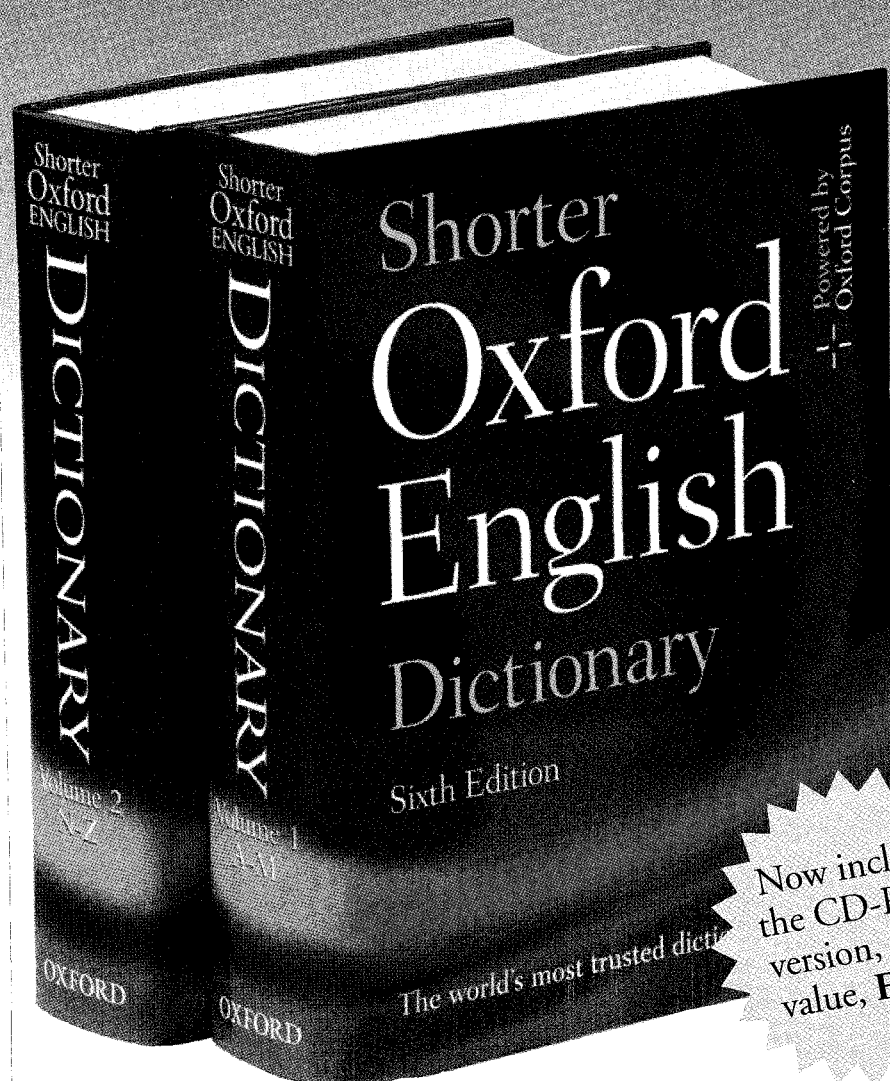
expansion of the welfare rolls—that drove many Democratic voters into the arms of the GOP.

By the same token, Bai helps to maintain the fiction—and it is very much a fiction—that the new progressives are outsiders “storming the gates” of the Democratic party and engaged in a great argument with its center. While it is true that most started out as political neophytes, they remained outside party councils for all of a New York minute. Rather than a struggle of outsiders versus insiders, what emerges conspicuously in Bai’s account is the rapidity with which the insurgents have been brought into the orbit of leadership.

*The Argument* is replete with scenes of major Democratic politicians prostrating themselves before the progressives at events like the YearlyKos convention. After the third or fourth such vignette, the claim of an ongoing power struggle in the party rings hollow. Given how little Bai thinks the bloggers actually have to offer, apart from “profanity, hyperbole, and conspiracy theories,” one cannot but be struck by the respect they are paid by Washington Democrats.

Finally, one wishes Bai had gone further in evaluating the consequences of all this ferment for the Democratic party. Developing new ideas may not be the forte of the new progressives, but enforcing adherence to old ones is. They have already become the energized base of the party. If they succeed in destroying what remains of its center, what then? The coming election season may offer an answer.

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